PlayStation 3 PlayStation Portable PlayStation Network PlayStation 2

PlayStation®

The Official Magazine

HOLIDAY 08

Game of the Year Contenders?

- ›Fallout 3
- ›LittleBigPlanet
- ›Rock Band 2

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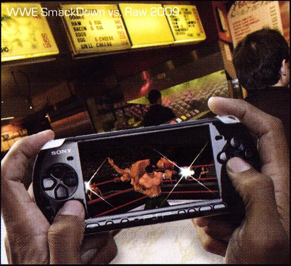
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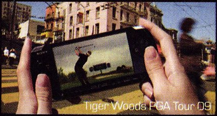
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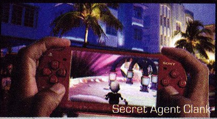
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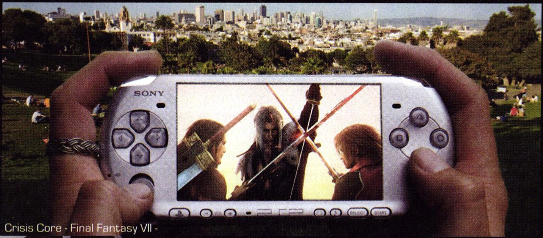
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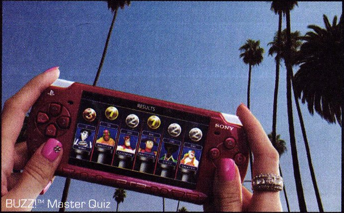
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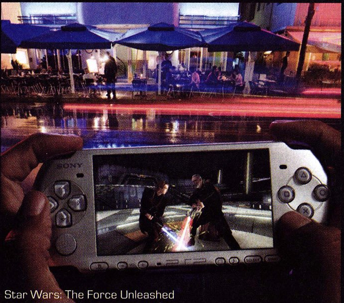
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PlayStation Portable

PLAYSTATION Network

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Sorry fanboys, the Teresa Dun action figure is not available for purchase.

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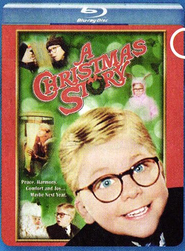
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A CHRISTMAS STORY
Peace. Harmony. Comfort and Joy... Maybe Next Year.

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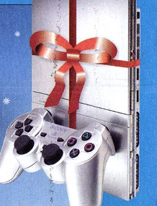
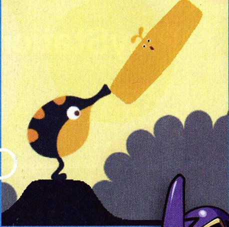
"I swear, if they get bullet holes in my brand new turtleneck..."

PlayStation 2: A Holiday Story

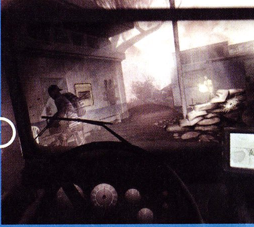


It's not just a game console, it's a tradition



"No, no! I'm still crooked, you moron. *Higher* on the left! Your *other* left!"

In the future, PEZ dispensers will be bigger and appear deadlier, but still provide a yummy treat.



"I don't know, honey... He doesn't look like a valet to me."

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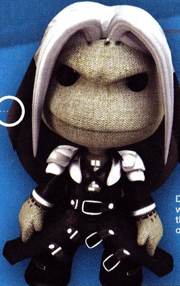
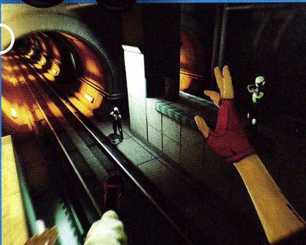
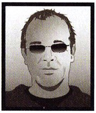


Don't you just want to hug the evil right out of him?

"Okay, but seriously, who thought it was a good idea to give the giant albino a gun?"



"Man, they're *really* getting serious about paying the toll."



Editor's Note

"Folks don't laugh so loud when you've a grand in your back pocket."

Happy Birthday to us! This issue represents the one year anniversary of PlayStation: The Official Magazine. Thirteen issues. Enough time for the PlayStation 3 to take steady steps along its charted path to dominance. Enough time for the PS2 to settle into its mainstream-friendly, license-heavy long tail ride into the console sunset. Enough time for the PSP to spark, sputter, spark again, and sputter in a regular rollercoaster of developer and user enthusiasm mixed with sporadic apathy. Enough time for us to get the PTOM team prepped to bring you the best, most informative, entertaining, and insightful coverage of your favorite platform. Enough time for us to just get started.

Just look at this issue. So many games hitting shelves ready for review. More importantly, so many quality titles that will make you stop and stare at the shelf, pondering where to plunk down that hard-earned (and in these trying economic times hard-to-come-by) gaming dollar. What stands out in particular this issue, though, is the type of game we're seeing. PlayStation in its earlier iterations wasn't considered a home for straight up, what you might consider "PC" action games, the first-person shooter. As those games became more popular elsewhere, so the need emerged to bring PlayStation 3 in line. We felt, for a few months, like the only games in development were shooters. We talked about *Resistance 2, Killzone 2, SOCOM* (all first-party, notably), *Call of Duty, Haze,* and so many more. Where, we wondered, were the RPGs. Aside from *Fallout 3* and a smattering of Japanese fare *(Eternal Sonata, White Knight Chronicles,* etc.) the outlook was bleak.

PREMIERE ISSUE
PlayStation
The Official Magazine
WORLD EXCLUSIVE
GRAN TURISMO 5
TOP 10 WARHAWK TACTICS
PLAYSTATION EYE
CALL OF DUTY 4
MANHUNT 2

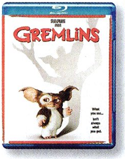
> "We felt, for a few months, like the only games in development were shooters."

So it's as much a relief as it is a statement of the PlayStation 3 catalogue rounding out that we showcase our cover this month as a brand-new spy-themed RPG. *Alpha Protocol,* if it wasn't on your radar from its limited airing over the past couple of months, most certainly will be after you've devoured Gary's dissection of the ambition level and style being crafted under the watchful eye of developers Obsidian. Teresa also reviews another RPG, the aforementioned *Fallout 3,* rightly one of the most anticipated games of the year. Plus, after a brief blip in its release schedule, you're probably already playing *LittleBigPlanet,* but see what Roger thought on page 56, along with our first efforts at level design!

This month we were also pleasantly surprised by *Spider-Man: Web of Shadows,* and *Rock Band 2* delivered exactly what we expected. The common denominator in all these games? Not a shooter among them. Next month, we'll put *Resistance 2* through its paces (at press time we're learning the maps in the beta), go back to war in *Call of Duty,* and more. All that serves to outline the broader spectrum of gaming coming into view for PS3 owners. My question to you: what's missing? Still too few RPGs? What about strategy; did *EndWar* pique your interest enough to yell at your TV screen? What else for the PlayStation Network? My personal request is for a pinball game. PSN is desperately in need of a pinball game. And what else? Thoughts and answers to the usual address.

Rob

"Quote" contest



It's that time again. Recognize the quote at the top of this column? It's from a movie, and all you need do to win a random Blu-ray movie from my desk is to identify said movie, and send your answer to **PTOM_editor@futureus.com** with the words Ed Note Holiday in the subject line. Remember to include your mailing address so that erstwhile intern mailer extraordinaire Carlos can ship out your prize. If your name is Miguel Rutledge of Eugene, OR, then congratulations because you correctly identified last month's quote from the brilliant Bond flick, *Casino Royale* (the new one), and a movie will be winging its way to you post haste.

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The Official Magazine

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ART
ART DIRECTOR **Ken Bousquet**
DESIGN CONTRIBUTORS **Katrin Auch, Gary Liew, Shelley Szudera**

BUSINESS
ASSOCIATE GENERAL MANAGER **Kristen Salvatore**
ksalvatore@futureus.com
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR INTEGRATED SALES **Nate Hunt**
562-983-8004, nhunt@futureus.com
DIRECTOR INTEGRATED SALES **Lee Horowitz**
650-238-2488, lhorowitz@futureus.com
REGIONAL SALES DIRECTOR (Bay Area) **Christina Grushkin**
650-238-2504, cgrushkin@futureus.com
REGIONAL SALES DIRECTOR (South West) **Isaac Ugay**
949-218-0981, iugay@futureus.com
WEST COAST ACCOUNT MANAGER **Rachel Campos**
rcampos@futureus.com
ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE **Benjamin Alessio**
650-238-2324, balessio@futureus.com
EAST COAST MANAGER CONSUMER SALES **Marc Zenker**
646-723-5476, mzenker@futureus.com
WEST COAST MANAGER CONSUMER SALES **Nadine Weiss**
310-424-2254, nweiss@futureus.com
MIDWEST MANAGER CONSUMER SALES **Jodi Sosna**
212-217-1358, jsosna@futureus.com
ADVERTISING EXECUTIVE **Arthur St. Germain**
650-238-2571, astgermain@futureus.com
ADVERTISING COORDINATOR **Heidi Hapin**
650-238-2475, hhapin@futureus.com
MARKETING MANAGER **Andrea Recio-Ang**
arecio-ang@futureus.com

PRODUCTION
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR **Richie Lesovoy**
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DIRECTOR CONSUMER MARKETING **Rich McCarthy**
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FUTURE PLC
30 Monmouth St., Bath, Avon, BA1 2BW, England
Tel +44 1225 442244
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NON-EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN: Roger Parry
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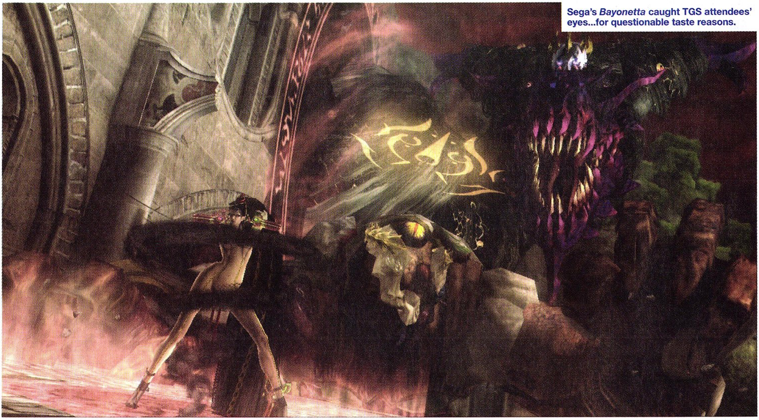


Sega's *Bayonetta* caught TGS attendees' eyes...for questionable taste reasons.

» ON LOCATION AT TGS

MONSTER BASH

Few fireworks, but solid PSP support on Sony's home turf at the celebrated Tokyo Game Show

Surreal. Even for veterans of the videogame industry's spotty history of trade shows (spanning big E3, recent mini-E3, Leipzig Game Convention, and even England's ECTS that circled all its booths around a central bar—which said a lot for the way business was getting done back then), Tokyo Game Show is just plain weird. Good weird, bad weird, or plain weird weird depends largely on each attendee's inner otaku. Over the two business days we witnessed sights and sounds worthy of story-telling well into the night…and with the adjustment to crossing the International Date Line exacerbating the feel of entering a twilight zone those nights or early mornings dictated weirdness all of their own.

That's before the onslaught of the two days when the show is open to the public, when cramped walkways turn into seas of people more viscous than fluid, trickling through the eight long halls. This is when the cosplayers set up camp in the open areas breaking up the hallways. Cameramen—some fans, some fellow cosplayers, and many just creepy old guys who really should know better—clutter the spaces, politely asking for permission to take pictures of Sephiroths and Dantes, Chun Lis and, huh? Nubile nurses? Best not to ask, and just accept, that this is Tokyo Game Show.

Sony's booth housed many of the PlayStation 3 games we've been seeing for the past few months, and included a "Mature" area that was far less enticing than it sounds. All its M-rated games *(Killzone 2, SOCOM: Confrontation,*

Do Numbers Lie?

The Computer Entertainment Supplier's Association—the group that organizes and runs the Tokyo Game Show—released a few fascinating facts and figures about the expectations of this year's show:

Booths: 1768 (up from 1735 last year)

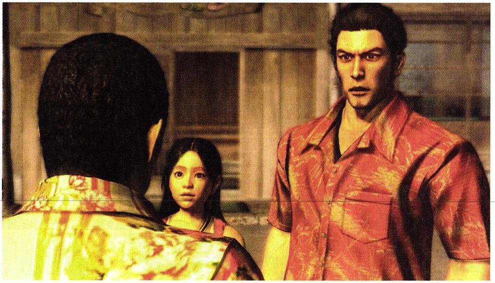
Titles shown: 879 (up from 702 last year)

Expected attendance: 180,000

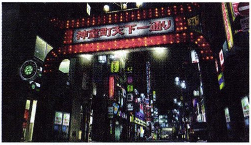
Percent of all titles shown to be on PS3: 3.5%

Percent of all titles shown to be on PS2: 1.7%

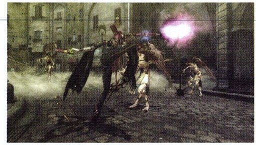
Percent of all titles shown to be on PSP: 7.8%



Ryu ga Gotoku 3 (the Japanese title we know as *Yakuza 3)* will pick up the story of Kiryu Kazuma where *Yakuza 2* left off. This sequel will, apparently, include voiceovers from big-name Japanese talent.



The ramp up to PS3 visuals will really pay off in bringing the *Yakuza 3* world to life.



With guns in the heels of her boots, and a "unique" body type, Bayonetta will showcase a totally original fighting style.

Resistance 2, etc.) required an ID check to ensure access only to those over 17 years of age, with a door guarded by what appeared to be a shy Helghast. Shy because we weren't allowed to take his picture. Maybe Helghast security insisted. Maybe it was just a weird no-no in such an oh-sure place.

A rolling video screen enticed us with a view of the future. *Final Fantasy Versus XIII* (still a worldwide PS3 exclusive) showcased the high visual fidelity you expect from Square cutscenes (see boxout). Sega's *Bayonetta* revealed itself as a visually spectacular experience clearly pulling from the *Devil May Cry* pedigree of its creator, Hideki Kamiya. It also revealed its comically perverse potential: the main character, Bayonetta, looks fabulous when being chased by an enormous giant munching the staircase behind her (though the giant reminding us of the Burger King's bigger, badder, kinglier brother undermined much of the fear factor), but the camera angles panning around and under her, ahem, nether regions are such a pathetic attempt at titillation as to be embarrassing to everyone involved.

KILLZONE 2
ID CHECK

Yakuza 3 for PS3 showed terrific promise with slick character presentations and, though no English translation was available, the story of being forced back into criminal shenanigans appeared compelling. No official word yet on a U.S. release, but don't be surprised if it takes at least nine months after the Japan release for all the localizations to be complete.

As for the brief video of *Katamari Damacy* creator, Keita Takahashi's *Nobi Nobi Boy?* Unintelligible. A segmented worm slithering through colors on a black background. Not much in the way of information, for sure, but at least confirmation that the game is moving forward for *Katamari* fans clamoring for a new puzzle challenge some time in 2009.

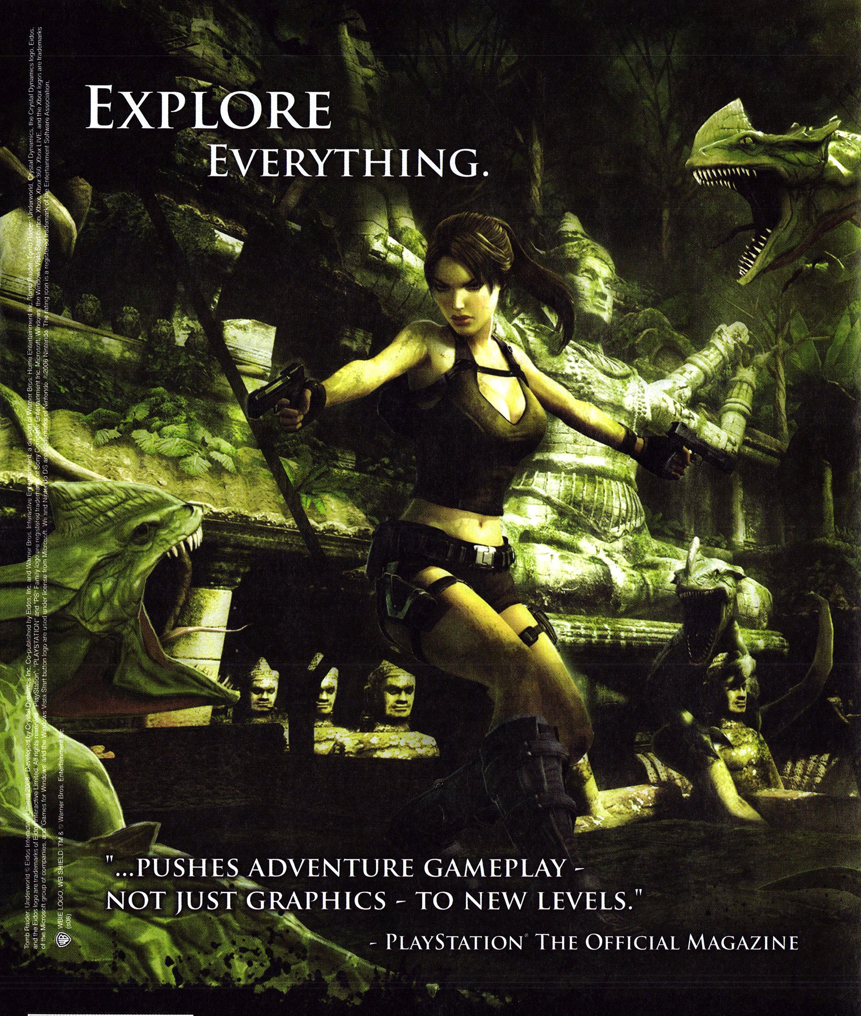
Sony showcased several new games and functions specifically for the Japanese PlayStation Store, including two cats that will deliver game news through your (Japanese only) PS3 and PSP. That's right. Cats, sat behind cardboard boxes, delivering a daily dose of gaming news. You can't make this stuff up. (See page 20 *[Patapon 2]* for news on the PSP front.)

So was the show a monster smash? For Capcom and the phenomenon of its *Monster Hunter* franchise, that would be a resounding yes. While *Monster Hunter 3 (Tri)* is an exclusive on Nintendo's Wii the massive line to get hands-on time reinforced how popular this PS2 and PSP action RPG has become. Unique cards for the tabletop collectible Monster Hunter card game were a hot commodity, and it was confirmed to us that *Monster Hunter Portable 2G* for PSP will be coming to the PS2 in the U.S. in early 2009 under the name *Monster Hunter Freedom Unite.* That will be a perfect opportunity to find out more about what many millions of Japanese gamers have been going so ga-ga over.

Square Enix's Closed Mega Theater

A benefit to having a press pass (and helpful PR folks) is getting VIP access to Square Enix's Closed Mega Theater presentation, thus avoiding a near three-hour wait with the regular people. Inside The Last Order music from *Final Fantasy VII* set the expectation before we were treated to a series of trailers showcasing the milking of the *Kingdom Hearts* franchise on mobile phones for the Japanese market! The good stuff, however, was very good. ***Kingdom Hearts Birth By Sleep*** takes the Cinderella fairytale and thrusts you into the middle of the politics and action. ***The 3rd Birthday*** looks to be an incredibly stylish thriller packed into the PSP, with character design by *Final Fantasy* legend Tetsuya Nomura. Of course, the most anticipation was reserved for ***Final Fantasy XIII.*** While no gameplay was shown, the visuals on the trailer were simply stunning, and set the game in our minds as the one with the production potential to eclipse the high bar set by *MGS4.* Curiously, after a brief glimpse of ***FFXIII Agito*** gameplay on PSP (supported by sweet cutscene direction), the finale was left for ***Final Fantasy Versus XIII.*** Beginning with a Shakespearean quote, the modern setting seemed at odds with the fantastical abilities of the characters as portals open, swords appeared in hands, and battle was drawn on city streets filled with regular cars. Only the broadest release dates—2009—were mentioned, but we suspect that *FF XIII Agito* will come first, with *FFXIII* by November 2009, and a slight chance of *Versus XIII* hitting before that date.But don't count on any of those.

Walking out of the show for the last time was as surreal an experience as the entrance, as a Muzak version of "Auld Lang Syne" piped in over the din of booths shutting down, hinting to folks that the exit and the muggy air of an October evening in Tokyo beckoned. Dutifully the several thousand visitors trooped into the sunset, another Tokyo Game Show over, but never to be forgotten.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(s08)

TEEN
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Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Violence

Games for Windows
XBOX 360 LIVE
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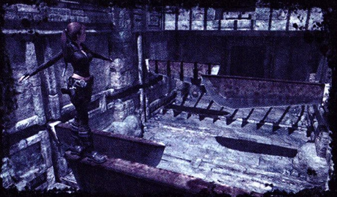

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PlayStation®2 PLAYSTATION 3 CRYSTAL DYNAMICS eidos

OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION INTERVIEW

GARRETT YOUNG

After Daniel Craig reinvigorated the Bond persona in *Casino Royale,* the blockbuster franchise seemed on a modern track. We didn't get a game based on that movie, but with the rights now housed at Activision we're standing on the doorstep of a new era for the franchise and the games that put you in the shoes of the debonair British spy. We interrogated the Executive Producer of the Bond franchise about what it's like working with such a powerhouse franchise, and the ambitions of the game based on it.

PTOM: Since Daniel Craig and *Casino Royale* in one fell swoop appeared to reinvigorate the entire Bond franchise, did that translate into extra pressure in expectations for this first game of the Craig era?

Garrett Young: It was actually more of an opportunity for us than pressure. Daniel Craig is a much more physical, more cunning, and more dangerous Bond, so we took that as an opportunity to give gamers something new—something they hadn't seen or played in a Bond game before. We added a Takedown system (whether from stealth or in hand-to-hand combat) and more acrobatic action in cinematic moments and boss fights, which are the types of things you see Daniel Craig do as Bond in *Casino Royale* and *Quantum of Solace.*

From a game design standpoint, what were the particular features of the "new" Bond that you wanted to capture?

The Takedown system was a big one, as were the acrobatic moments in both stealth and action scenes. Another one that has a major impact on gameplay is the Cover Combat system: you start the game in first-person, but you can choose to take cover behind any wall or barrier throughout the game. This allows gamers to not only be safe when in a firefight, but to take a moment to assess a new situation or engagement space before progressing forward. It allows players to use their mind, as James Bond would.

On that note, one of the first things the filmmakers taught us when we started on this project was that Bond's greatest weapon is his mind; he is often out-manned and almost always out-gunned, so he must find strategic ways to overcome the odds and accomplish his mission.

How long, and how many iterations did it go through to get an approved Bond/Craig likeness in the game?

It probably took us six months all told to get the Daniel Craig model, textures, and animations looking the way we wanted. The artists did a tremendous job not only creating the early models, but also taking critical feedback and making marked improvements along the way. Daniel Craig is the star of our game, so we knew the quality bar we hit with his model would set the tone for the visual quality standard for the rest of the game.

What are the key elements that make movie license game design and production different from a non-licensed game?

Good question. How much time do you have? The short answer is this: a license like James Bond gives you not only a rich history to mine for creative ideas, but a great palette from which to design your character and his actions. There is pressure based on the high expectations of fans (us included), but this team really thrived under that pressure and got amazing results in a short period of time. Though we have a lot of very experienced guys, this team had never shipped a game together before, and I am very proud of the results we achieved.

Did the current game design vogue for timed sequences help give the action a more cinematic quality?

Yes, but in reverse. The goal was to provide some cool cinematic moments in the game with Bond on screen, as opposed to just standing behind the gun. We used a button-timing mechanic based on one of the pillars of our game design: we wanted this game to be a challenge to the hardcore daily gamer, but also approachable and accessible enough to avoid alienating the larger audience of James Bond fans. This requires a control scheme with a shallow learning curve. Given how easy button-timing systems are to use and their common usage in other games, this choice just made sense for us.

How tight was the game development relationship with the movie production?

It was actually really great, pretty much from the beginning. The guys on the film side were always super helpful during the process of making this game. They sent us thousands of photos, dozens of hours of video, a very early draft of the *QoS* script, and even had us out to the movie set four times to scan actors and watch filming. They want the game to be great, and it came across in how they worked with us.

We saw and heard a lot of confidential information, but one thing I can tell you: Bond girls are just as cute in real person as they are on the big screen!

Exactly how many "players" are involved in signing off on a Bond game design document?

There are really just a few key people who are involved in approving the things we do in the game: Barbara Broccoli, Michael Wilson, and Daniel Craig himself. James Bond is such a great character for a videogame, but at the end of the day, he is a character they created and their feedback is critical to making sure we represent him, his actions, and his world accurately.

> "There is pressure based on the high expectations of fans..."

Garrett Young 411

Executive Producer of the Bond team at Treyarch

AGE: 39

EDUCATION: University of Washington (Go Dawgs!)

FIRST GAME WORKED ON: *NBA Full Court Press* for Windows (Good luck finding a copy!)

PREFERRED MARTINI VARIANT: Grey Goose vodka, up, lemon twist (no olives), shaken.

FAVORITE BOND FILM BEFORE CASINO ROYALE: *The Spy Who Loved Me* (The first one I ever saw.)

I REMEMBER PLAYING [X] IN MY YOUTH BECAUSE: *Intellivision Football* (from Activision!), because of the great battles with my buddy down the street.

How closely does the game progress follow that of the movie? What elements of the story does the game fill in?

Very close. *Quantum of Solace* is actually the first true sequel in Bond movie history, picking up 15 minutes after *Casino Royale* ended. Our game tells the story of both movies.

Some scenes we kept pretty close to the movie (such as chasing the Bomber through the Construction Site), while in others we really expanded on the fiction to make it a more fun interactive experience (such as following Dimitrios to the Miami Science Center). We even have one level based on a scene that got cut from *Casino Royale*—not only do you play the movie, but you get to play some of the movie's "behind the scenes" parts too!

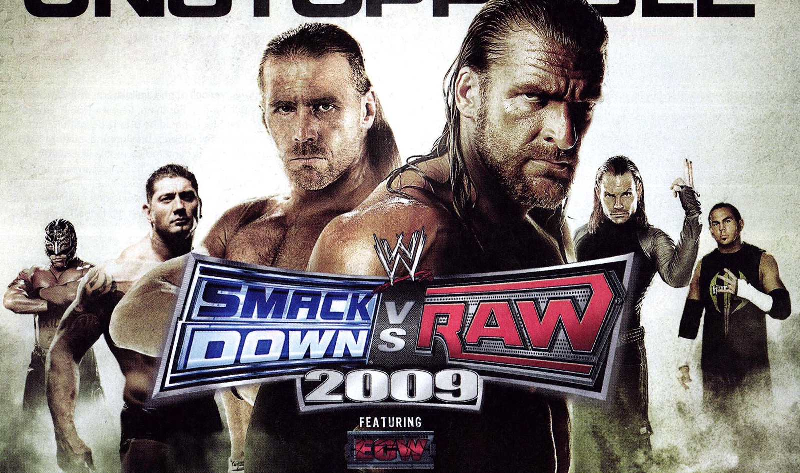
With multiplayer, all license restrictions have to be left at the door, right (since you can't manage players on the internet). How did that factor in to the multiplayer mode and map design and direction?

Multiplayer is a big part of the history of Bond games, given the great game Rare built in *GoldenEye.* From a licensing perspective, we really didn't have any issues. The filmmakers are very concerned about how Daniel Craig looks and acts, our voiceover script, the story, and the overall single-player gameplay (for example, the violence in the game). They understand the importance of multiplayer gameplay, and liked the game modes we created.

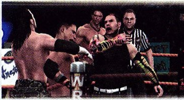
It was mentioned in the early preview coverage that Daniel Craig is a fan of the game, and wanted builds made available on set. Is that really true?!

Of course it's true! I'm a game developer, so I'm not very good at making up that kind of stuff. It was actually the very first time I showed him the game. A very cool guy, but he seemed a bit anxious at first—I think he was worried about how we made him look in the game. Once he saw it, he got much more comfortable. However, it did cause a bit of a problem: he was having so much fun playing, he wanted to show his buddies the next day—the day my flight left from London to LA. Thankfully the production assistants stepped in to assure me they would keep our build and our development kit safe and send it to me a few days later. I really didn't want to fight through Daniel Craig to bring my build back to the office...

ALONE, YOU'RE GREAT.
TOGETHER, YOU'RE UNSTOPPABLE



IN WWE, THE ONLY PERSON YOU CAN RELY ON, OTHER THAN YOURSELF, IS YOUR PARTNER. YOU HAVE EACH OTHER'S BACKS, AND TOGETHER, YOU CAN ACCOMPLISH MORE THAN YOU EVER COULD ON YOUR OWN.



New Tag Team Gameplay:
A new way to play with high-impact double team moves and new bone-crunching tag team finishers.

Create a Finisher:
An innovative user interface lets you design the most devastating finisher moves ever.

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Road to WrestleMania:
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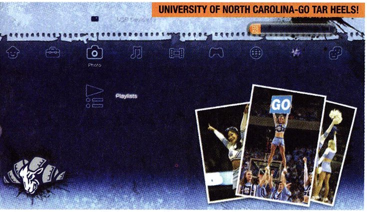
*Feature only available on Xbox 360® and PLAYSTATION®3 computer entertainment system.

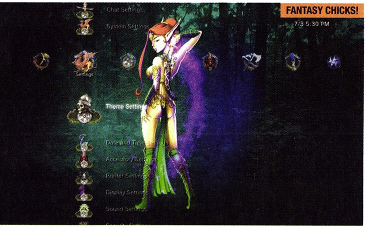
PlayStation Digest

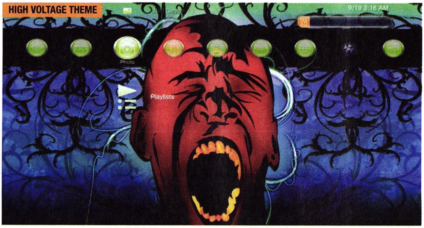
Top Stories, Industry Bits, and Oddities


UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA-GO TAR HEELS!
USB Device
Photo
Playlists
GO

Bling out your PS3

Some folks pay for ring tones, some buy cell phone wallpapers, and y'know what? Some people have too much money. For them, the new PS3 Premium Themes available at the PlayStation Store should be utterly delightful. For $.99 to $1.99 apiece, they'll get an aesthetically superior background, custom XMB icons, and in some cases, new sound effects, all centered on motifs like NCAA College licenses, splashy art, videogames, and of course, hot chicks in their under garments. It's a small price to pay for individuality, we suppose, but if you've got that much cash to spare, we know of several, ahem, editors who wouldn't mind the extra, er, milk money! Otherwise, look for the new Premium Themes tab in the Themes and Wallpapers section of the PlayStation Store.

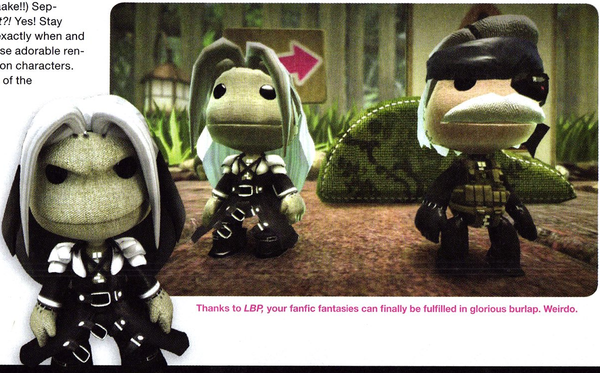

FANTASY CHICKS!
Chat Settings
System Settings
7/3 5:30 PM
Settings
Theme Settings
Date and Time Settings
Accessory Settings
Printer Settings
Display Settings
Sound Settings

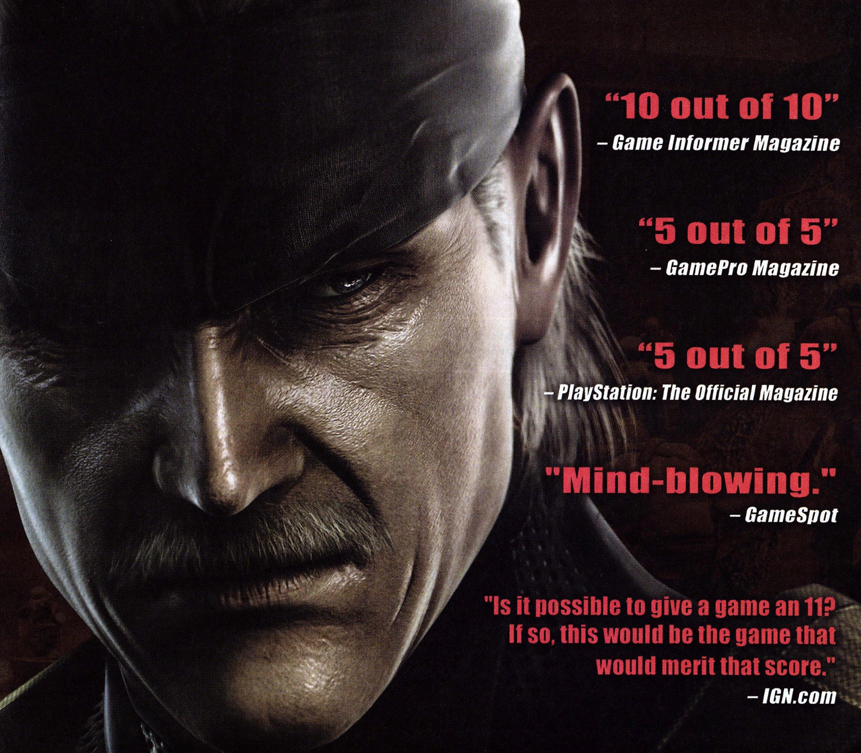

HIGH VOLTAGE THEME
9/19 3:16 AM
Photo
Playlists

Bickering about the Sack(boys)

Snake? (Snake?! Snaaaaaake!!) Sephiroth? In *LittleBigPlanet?!* Yes! Stay tuned for details about exactly when and how you'll be able to adopt these adorable renditions of our favorite PlayStation characters. For now, here's what members of the PTOM staff had to say.

Rob: Sackboy Snake would so kick Sackboy Sephiroth's ass.
Scott: Hey, is the Aeris Sackboy (Sackgirl?) sold separately? I sure hope so...
Gary: Who cares? Enough virtual Sackboys. Gimme a real-life huggable, kissable plush one already!
Roger: Sephiroth—the gender-ambiguous Sackboy(?). Snake—makes me feel conflicted: He's badass, but oh so huggable.


Thanks to *LBP*, your fanfic fantasies can finally be fulfilled in glorious burlap. Weirdo.



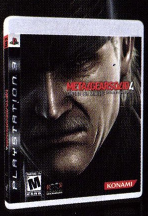
"10 out of 10"
– Game Informer Magazine

"5 out of 5"
– GamePro Magazine

"5 out of 5"
– PlayStation: The Official Magazine

"Mind-blowing."
– GameSpot

**"Is it possible to give a game an 11?
If so, this would be the game that
would merit that score."**
– IGN.com



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Not Rated by the ESRB

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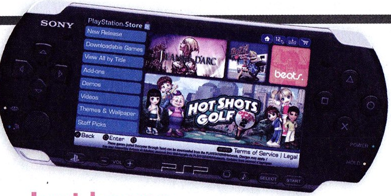

Just keeps gettin' better and better

Holiday cash in one pocket; PSP in the other. In the spirit of the holidays, bring the two together! Thanks to Firmware 5.00, you can now purchase items from the PlayStation Store straight from your PSP. (We recommend grabbing *Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords, Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee,* and *flOw!)* We love it when we can shop without leaving the comfort of our homes. (No, we're not lazy. We just like to minimize unnecessary exertion.)

Meanwhile, the PS3 has received several enhancements in Firmware 2.50, including power save settings for your controllers (finally, no need to manually turn off your controller before you Fold!), the ability to take and upload in-game screenshots (compatible games only, sorry), and support for the PS3 Official Bluetooth Headset. Ah, we love the holidays. And the holiday spirit. And spirits in general.

The first rule of Fight Club...

Everyone knows the rule: You don't talk about Fight Club. Well, PTOM is bravely breaking that rule to let you in on a little rumor we heard... Come 2009, we'll most likely be seeing the first next-gen stateside release of a *King of Fighters* title, developed by SNK and published here by Ignition. Okay, so that's not really about Fight Club at all, but it is a beloved classic fighting franchise...and the series has enough hardcore fans to form a club. Hmm, the possibilities...

Oh, fulfill our Phantasies!

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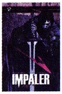
A massive roleplaying epic in the palm of your hand.

RPG lovers who haven't picked up a PSP yet might finally be pushed over the edge (and the smart ones who already own a PSP can giggle in giddy glee). Sega has announced that *Phantasy Star Portable* will be released this coming March, with over 150 exclusive new weapons and items, elaboration of the story (set right after the events of *Phantasy Star Universe*), and four-player online multiplayer support.

TOP10LIST

What we're playing, watching, reading, and consuming this month. Whattya mean it's wrong to buy a Christmas present for yourself?!



Impaler | Graphic Novel | $14.95
We mentioned this item last month, but Rob's former *PC Gamer* colleague Bill "William" Harms has his thrilling vampire tale hitting shelves as this issue hits. The first six issues are in this first trade paperback (the original three were released as standalones some time ago) with the individual episodes available at your local comic book store. Once again, shout out to Billy, and go buy *Impaler.* This is no empty plug—the story is intense, powerful, and not to be missed.

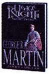
Star Trek films | Star Trek films | $4 per rental
The *Star Trek* series has always been a bit too intimidating for Teresa to dive into (40 years worth of material, after all)...but after stumbling upon *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* and loving it, she rushed out to rent *The Wrath of Khan* and *The Search for Spock.* Now, she's totally infatuated with the series (especially Kirk and Spock!) and is hungering for more. Live geek and prosper, Tizzy.

Hearos | Earplugs | $10 for 40
Between his neighbor's nonstop home-improvement construction and Butters' nonstop pounding on every drum kit, guitar, and assorted music peripheral ever created (no one ever accused us of not being thorough!), Gary needs to protect his sanity the only way he can: by retreating into a self-created cocoon of silence. "It's so warm...so cozy...so safe...it's my happy place!"

Bakugan Battle Brawlers | Toy | $7.99
Roger has zero idea how to play the card game that serves as the foundation of this anime-derived toy-nomenon. But like his son, he's transfixed by how the little ball creatures transform into battle mode when they roll over the cards. And it's just fun to say *Bakugan. Ba...ku...gan.* Now, say it with a crazy, agitated, pseudo-Japanese accent: *Baaaaaa-kuuu-GAAANNNNN!* Good stuff.

All Night Diners | Restaurant | How much for pancakes?
Scott recently rediscovered an old culinary passion: the American diner, an eating establishment that exists specifically to remind us all that calories are simply a measure of deliciousness. What better way to celebrate this inalienable truth than by eating a plate of chocolate-chip pancakes at three in the morning? (And a coronary bypass at the age of 43?)

Sportacular | Apple App | Free
If you're part of the gadget illuminati (like Ken) and are fortunate enough to own an iPhone or iPod Touch, the Sportacular app offers scores, news, and updates every 30 seconds. So if you happen to be holding a baby in a dark room there's no need to miss what's happening in the bottom of the 7th inning. Or peek to see if Monday Night Football is really worth turning on.



The Hedge Knight II | Book | $19.99
Tired of waiting for the next installment in George R.R. Martin's epic fantasy opus? Tide yourself over with the excellent comic adaptation of this prequel story focusing on the legendary Ser Duncan the Tall. It's almost enough to keep Gary from going gaga in anticipation for *A Dance with Dragons.* Almost. (C'mon, now, George—finish that darn sequel already!)

Unstructured, by Clarks | Shoes | Around $100
Teresa's on her feet for about, oh, 10 minutes each day (the rest of the time is spent in front of her computer and/or PlayStation units). But for those 10 minutes, she demands comfortable footwear. Clarks' new Unstructured line offers soft, lightweight shoes (for both men and women!) that makes Teresa feel like she's walking on sunshine.

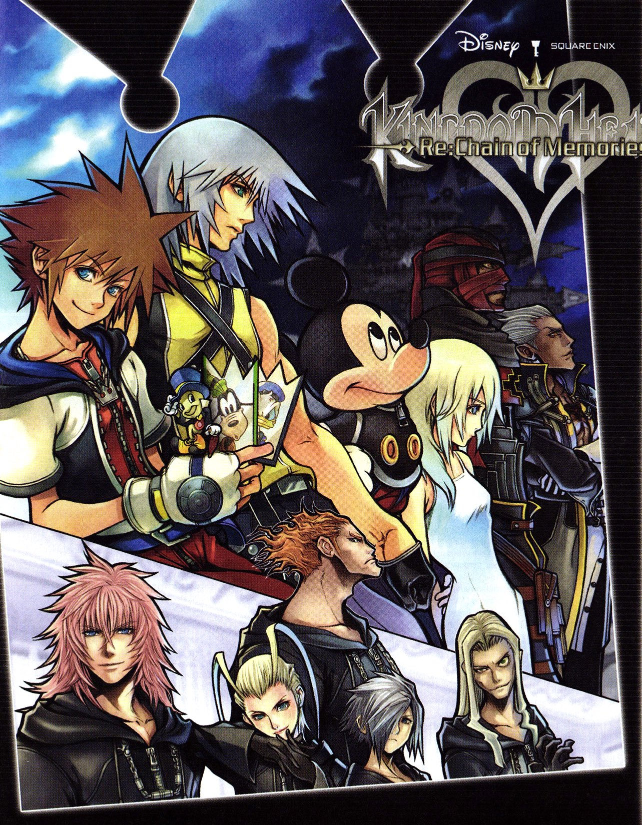
ASIAN MAN RECORDS

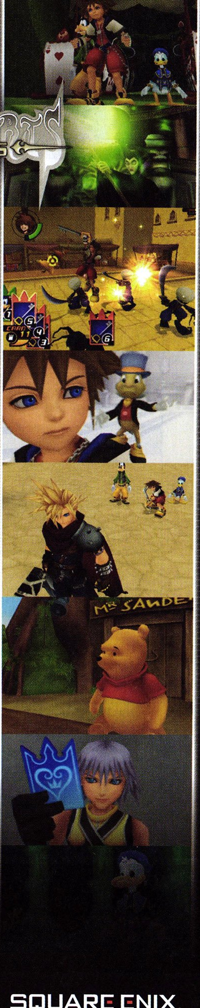
Asian Man Records | Record Company | All CDs $8
Rather than plug a single band this month, Scott decided to suck up to the Man and plug a record label. Run by a handful of people out of a garage in San Jose, Asian Man Records has consistently put out some of the highest quality music at the most affordable prices (all CDs are just $8) [nice] and has served as the launching point for acts like Alkaline Trio [blank stare].

Yoplait Vanilla Yo-Plus Yogurt | Food | $4 for a four-pack
According to Yoplait, one cup of Yo-Plus yogurt provides a unique Optibalance™ blend of both probiotics and prebiotics—including three grams of fiber—that help keep your digestive system in balance. We're not sure what that means, and while we prefer not to know any details about Roger's digestive system, he assures us that Yo-Plus is a yummy treat and good for you to boot.

Disney SQUARE ENIX

KINGDOM HEARTS
Re:Chain of Memories





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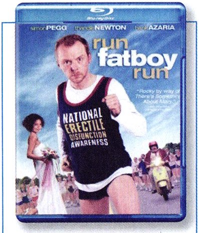
Blu-ray Central It'll be a Blu Christmas without you

This month runs through the gamut of the movie experience. We have several truly great and classic first time HD releases, rounded out by some truly awful garbage. Plus, the PTOM editors' pick their Holiday Blu-ray favorites!


Blu-ray Disc
Simon PEGG Thandie NEWTON Hank AZARIA
run fatboy run
NATIONAL ERECTILE DISFUNCTION AWARENESS

PlayStation: The Official Magazine
DATE MOVIE OF THE MONTH

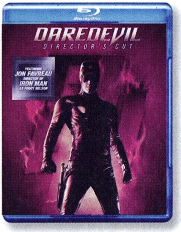
Run Fatboy Run

PRICE: $38.96 **RATED:** PG-13

| MOVIE | Once you get over the idea that Simon Pegg *(Shaun of the Dead)* could score Thandie Newton to begin with (let alone leave her at the altar), *Run Fatboy Run* is a charming and hilarious comedy that manages to cover all the bases for guys and girls. It's not all-out raunchy, but still has bite, and Pegg ably portrays an affable loser legitimately trying to change for the woman he loves.

| EXTRAS | Commentary with Pegg, Newton, Gill Pegg, and director David Schwimmer is as engaging as you'd expect, and a perfect commentary primer for our better halves who think the whole idea is stupid. The deleted scenes are worth checking out as well, and the montage of outtakes make the overall meager set of extras worth sticking around for.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★½



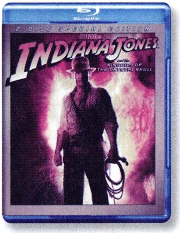
Daredevil: Director's Cut

PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | The most obscure and misunderstood of Marvel's heroes, *Daredevil* hit theaters as a crippled PG-13 cut. Director Mark Steven Johnson had intended the movie to be R-rated, and on Blu-ray that much superior cut gets a chance to shine. Still not likely to gather droves of fans, partially due to the miscasting of Ben Affleck, this is a remarkably true cinematic interpretation of the character. Johnson's penchant for corny "comic book" moments is still an issue, but overall, this is a solid, dark superhero movie.

| EXTRAS | The original DVD release offered a surprising amount of extras—mostly featurettes covering everything from the comic origins, to the costume design, the location, and the villains. The original director's commentary is included as well, and there's plenty of talk about differences between the theatrical cut and his intended version. The only new element here is the picture-in-picture enhanced viewing mode.

MOVIE ★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★½



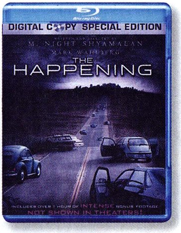
Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG-13

| MOVIE | Grandpa Indy is back, although it's clear the mileage has caught up with him. It's hard to imagine that this was anyone's ideal return for the iconic action hero, yet *Crystal Skull* gives us a well-intentioned and welcome last look at the series' wonderful cliffhanger action. The movie is fun, even if the plot makes little sense, and Ford uses his age to good effect here—he might be old, but the man can still kick your ass.

| EXTRAS | Two discs full of Indy goodness make this release well worth having for fans. The extras are all in HD, and much of the content covers the entire series. The production diary on disc 2 is basically an in-depth and lengthy set of documentaries that cover all aspects of the *Crystal Skull* filming. The rest of the features are shorter and of varying interest, but the lack of star and directory commentary is disappointing.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★


Blu-ray Disc
DIGITAL COPY SPECIAL EDITION
M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN
MARK WAHLBERG
THE HAPPENING
INCLUDES OVER 1 HOUR OF INTENSE BONUS FOOTAGE NOT SHOWN IN THEATERS!

The Happening

PRICE: $39.98 **RATED:** R

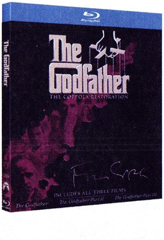
| MOVIE | M. Night Shyamalan's first R-rated movie, *The Happening,* is horrible. It's actually his worst movie yet, which must have taken considerable effort. If this were straight-to-video or SciFi Channel special, it would still be just as worthlessly bad; but decent, brand-name actors and good production values makes this tale of people committing suicide in droves thanks to an unknown toxin so much worse. The dialogue is truly awful and the "horrifying" death scenes have all the emotional impact of a Bunny Suicides comic strip.

| EXTRAS | For such an odious movie, there sure are a lot of extras. Most aren't worth the effort—the usual making-of bits and plenty of talk of about the greatness and originality of the movie. There's no commentary, but an ongoing "bonusview" takes care of your trivia and picture-in-picture addiction.

MOVIE ★
EXTRAS ★★½

Our reviewer

Jason D'Aprile reviews movies from his technology-laden cabin in the woods and wonders about your view on disc extras. Do you ever buy a movie because of the extras? Do you look at them? And do people think you're strange because of it? Let us know at: **PTOM_bluray@futureus.com.** He loves to hear all your deep, deep thoughts.



The Godfather Collection

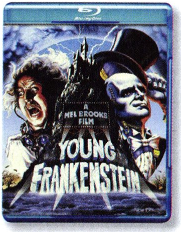
PlayStation: The Official Magazine
PICK OF THE MONTH

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | Paramount's release of *The Godfather* trilogy on Blu-ray is hardly surprising. It's a required purchase for any movie lover's collection. But almost 40 years after the original release, it's amazing just how relevant these movies are to American cinema and culture. The first two are very nearly perfect examples of filmmaking, and if you haven't seen them—and we mean seriously watched them (probably a couple of times), not just caught them on late-night cable—you're missing out on a defining cinematic experience. The third movie is admittedly inferior, but certainly not as terrible as the press of the time labeled it. The first two were a tough act to follow.

| EXTRAS | Aside from a beautifully executed remastering of the films, the set contains all the extras from the last DVD boxed set and new HD content. The combination of all the old documentaries, Coppola's honest and insightful commentaries, photo and character galleries, new shorts on the restoration, and much more, make this a remarkably well-rounded and worthy set.

MOVIE ★★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★



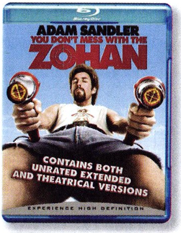
Young Frankenstein

PRICE: $34.95 RATED: PG

| MOVIE | If the words "Frau Blucher!" don't mean anything to you or elicit an immediate sense of joy, rush out immediately and buy this disc. If those words are familiar and full of joy, immediately rush out and buy this disc. *Young Frankenstein* remains Mel Brooks' best (yes, even considering *Blazing Saddles),* and is easily one of the greatest comedies ever made.

| EXTRAS | Everything fans could hope for in a special edition of a special movie is here. Commentary from Mel Brooks, deleted scenes and outtakes, interviews with the cast, bizarre gags, trivia, production photos, and plenty of making-of shorts. It's the only *Young Frankenstein* you'll ever need!

MOVIE ★★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★★


Adam Sandler
You Don't Mess with the Zohan
Contains both unrated extended and theatrical versions
Experience High Definition

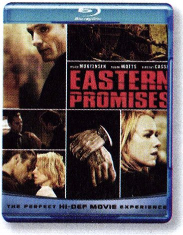
You Don't Mess with the Zohan

PRICE: $38.96 RATED: PG-13/UNRATED

| MOVIE | If you think being a movie critic is fun, watch this movie…twice. Proof that Judd Apatow's over-exposed name is now meaningless (he gets co-writing credit), there's nothing to recommend in this disaster. If hummus and male bush jokes are your idea of comedy, and you like your ladies older (much, much older), then partake, but this is Sandler's all-time low.

| EXTRAS | Far more extras than the movie deserves, including two different commentary tracks. The first track, with Sandler and friends is better than the movie, while the director's commentary is boring. There are a surprising variety of shorts and deleted scenes, but most are pretty lame. All the extras are in HD, however.

MOVIE ★
EXTRAS ★★★



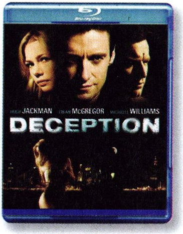
Eastern Promises

PRICE: $29.95 RATED: R

| MOVIE | David Cronenberg is the most mainstream art house director out there. Not shy about sex, graphic violence, and disturbing content, he's made a career of pushing boundaries. With *A History of Violence,* he proved he could push the line right to your local cinema, and *Eastern Promises* is largely similar. Also starring Viggo Mortensen, this tale of the Russian mob is incredibly smart and intense, and props should go to Viggo for proving that he will, apparently, do anything for his art.

| EXTRAS | Four shorts. That's all you get. At least one of them is about the outrageous bathhouse scene.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★



Deception

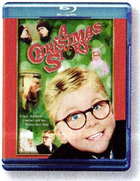
PRICE: $39.99 RATED: R

| MOVIE | The first part of *Deception* is an amusingly erotic story of a dysfunctional nerd who gets inducted into a world of no-strings sex with hot professional women who have no time for foreplay or names. Unfortunately, the other part is a nonsensical thriller about idiots. Ewan McGregor and Hugh Jackman are fun to watch, and there's plenty of eye candy here, but it might have been better if the plot had stuck to sex instead of clichéd B-grade thriller fodder.

| EXTRAS | Dry commentary with occasional glints of interest, and an array of often unintentionally amusing shorts (particularly on the subject of sex clubs) give *Deception* a decent, if standard set of extras. Also, the alternate ending actually makes more sense than the theatrical finale.

MOVIE ★★
EXTRAS ★★½

THE PTOM EDITORS' HOLIDAY BLU-RAY PICKS

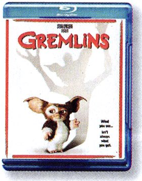


A Christmas Story

"I want an Official Red Ryder Carbine-Action Two-Hundred-Shot Range Model Air Rifle!"

"You'll shoot your eye out, kid."

If TBS's 24-hour marathon can't satisfy your year-long cravings for Ralphie's holiday memories, then Rob triple-dog dares you to get this Blu-ray.



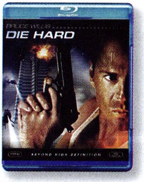
Gremlins

"Really?" Roger asked. "Really," Gary confirmed. Not because of the classic campy comedy horror is set during Christmas, but because of one very special actress: Phoebe Cates: A gift to modern cinema, at the height of her appeal. Aw, yeah. (If only *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* had a Christmas scene…)

Johnny Depp
Edward Scissorhands
Beyond High Definition

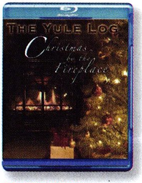
Edward Scissorhands

Teresa's sick of happy holiday movies, so her pick is *Edward Scissorhands* (the film's climax takes place on Christmas). In her opinion, it depicts a truer picture of human nature: dark, prejudiced, with the occasional presence of some much-needed compassion. Beautiful—just like Johnny Depp's sculpted visage, says Tizzy.



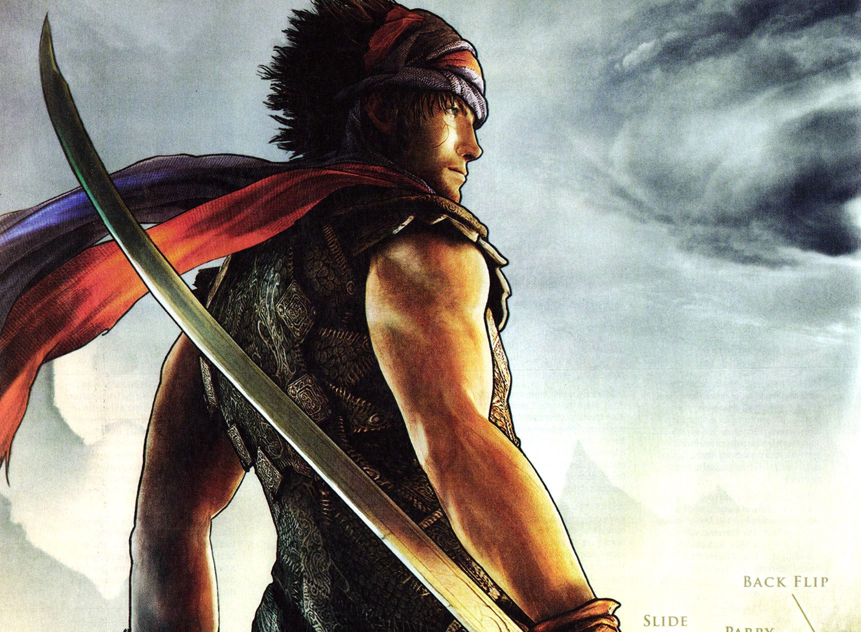
Die Hard

Scott's pick isn't exactly *It's a Wonderful Life,* but it's set during the holidays so it counts. Plus, *Die Hard* is exactly the kind of movie that truly benefits from the crisp, clear Blu-ray format. Pick it as the perfect antidote to those cheesy feel-good Hallmark flicks that you just can't seem to escape this time of year.



The Yule Log

In a disturbing juxtaposition of the real and digital worlds, Roger prefers the heartwarming image of a holiday fire on his 52-inch HD LCD TV (mounted above his real fireplace) to the butt-warming presence of an actual fire. He says everything looks better and realer in 1080p anyway. Disturbingly sad, Roger.



A New Hero Emerges—Master the elite, acrobatic fighting style of history's most agile warrior.

An Epic, Open World—Your choices determine just how the story evolves.

A Deadly New Ally—Your partner, Elika, is your greatest weapon against the darkness.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Alcohol Reference
Mild Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Violence

"A SURE CONTENDER FOR GAME OF THE YEAR" – IGN

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Destiny awaits you...
A LEGEND IS BORN
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ROOF RUN
GRIP FALL
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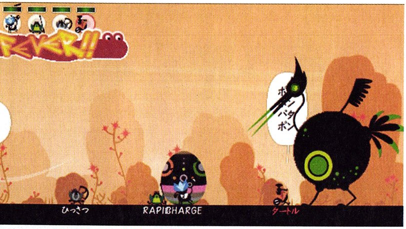
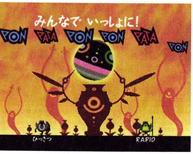
Going loco for PSP

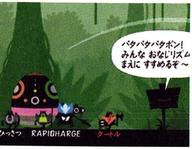


Hitting a consistent collective beat drives up the effectiveness of your unit attacks.

PSP | P



Explaining exactly what's going on in *Patapon 2* from a single screenshot is...tricky.



Eggs, Patapons, and talking... signposts? Never a dull moment in this world.

Patapon 2:

Dom Chaka

First Look Preview

The beat goes on

PSP GENRE: Strategy/Puzzle AVAILABLE: 2009 PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Sony Japan

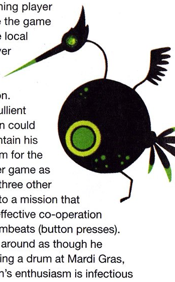
Bang, crash, wallop doesn't deliver the same rhythmic power as the subtly infectious Pata, Pata, Pata, Pon. Both sound collections could be easily emitted from pounded drum sets, but only the latter has the godly authority to lead an army of one-eye-no-body-two–legged entities into battle. That simple fact led a vast army of PSP fans to dance to the Patapon beat and propel a quirky, unconventional strategy rhythm game to cult and commercial success.

Commanding armies of Patapons using drum beats pounded out by skillful timing of PSP button presses proved surprisingly compelling. The mix of rhythm beat game dynamic with a core strategy directive (and RPG-lite progression) helped the original *Patapon* appeal to a broader set than might have initially looked at its stylized visuals and gasped a collective "wha?" A sequel had to be coming, and at TGS we got confirmation of a broad enhancement to the original that will up the strategy but retain the core style factor that played so well with the audience.

In fact, fan feedback to the original game played a significant role in the direction of *Patapon 2,* according to the game's designer, Hiroyuki Kotani. "More weapons, creating original Patapons, playing longer, and playing with friends" were the high points of the list of enhancements the team heard from its user base. Guess what? All of these elements are being incorporated in the sequel. Smart move.

The core storyline involves a Hero Patapon who's lost his memory and is found trapped under a large rock. Upon being released, the hero leads from the front line of your Patapon units on missions involving magical eggs and the recovery of the Hero mask. The macro level plot direction appears somewhat ancillary to the big additions to unit types, Rheapons, items, and even bosses. Compared to the original *Patapon's* six Rheapons, the sequel has 48 to accumulate. The 187 items to find in the original is expanded to a number somewhere north of 500. And to earn the bigger items and plot advances, *Patapon 2* will have 23 boss characters (expanding on the 11 in the original).

New characters such as the bird-riding Toripon, the robot Ebopon, and the magic-using Malopon provide fresh attack types and original personalities for your almighty ruler to manage. These additions increase the strategy required to challenge each mission and boss, and effective use of them will also make you a valuable member of any online co-op team. That's right, you and up to three buddies can bring your armies online for co-operative missions against set bosses, earning items that you'll then be able to use in the single-player campaign. Better yet, *Patapon 2* will support game-share, meaning that just one *Patapon 2* UMD-owning player can share the game with three local friends over the ad hoc connection.



The ebullient Kotani-san could hardly contain his enthusiasm for the multiplayer game as he roped three other players into a mission that required effective co-operation of the drumbeats (button presses). Bouncing around as though he were beating a drum at Mardi Gras, Kotani-san's enthusiasm is infectious and well-placed given the success of the original and the attempts to broaden the user base by incorporating as many player requests as possible in this sequel. We'll be banging these drums again when the game ships in 2009.

Rob Smith

> “The ebullient Kotani-san could hardly contain his enthusiasm for the multiplayer game as he roped three other players into a mission.”

PATAPON 2

He Bangs The Drums

THE SLIM FRAME of *Patapon 2* creator Hiroyuki Kotani seems barely robust enough to contain his brimming enthusiasm. He's grinning from ear to ear. He bounces, more pogo stick than hopping ball, eager to show off this sequel. Gripping the edge of his chair in seeming anticipation of being able to talk more about *Patapon 2,* we went behind and inside the reasons for Hiroyuki Kotani's enthusiasm.

PTOM: Were you surprised by the success of the original *Patapon?*
Hiroyuki Kotani: Honestly, yes, I was surprised, though as the creator I probably shouldn't say that. I thought I would be lucky if a few people enjoyed it, but I was very surprised by the success.

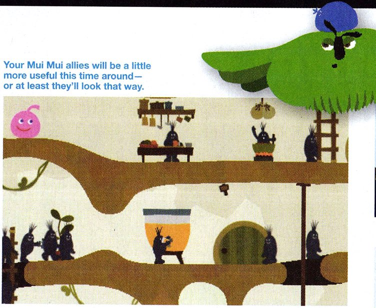
In taking on board so much user feedback in this design, were there highly requested features that couldn't be incorporated?
A number of people wanted versus player on player matches, but that's just something we couldn't do this time around.

Of all the new creature ideas you must have had, what was it about the Robot and Wizard that helped them make the final cut?
Really they were the ones I liked the most from a visual standpoint. All the new characters ended up very attractive from a fundamental gameplay standpoint, so I picked the ones I liked the most.

Is there a tight relationship between the single-player and multiplayer games where items, etc., can be transferred between the modes?
There's no difference between the single- and multiplayer, with both incorporated into any mission sequence, so what you have in single, you have in multiplayer. It's related to my original vision for *Patapon,* where there are many gods, and in the multiplayer stage those gods encounter each other.

How does the difficulty in multiplayer scale if you have less than four players?
Basically the AI takes over any open spots, so it's always four Patapons in multiplayer.

From all the characters, items, and additions, is any one of them your personal favorite?
I love Gorl, the leader of the Zigatons. In fact, I love him so much you can probably expect to see him in *Patapon 2.*



Your Mui Mui allies will be a little more useful this time around—or at least they'll look that way.

LocoRoco 2

I go Loco for Roco Puffs!

PSP **GENRE:** Puzzle **AVAILABLE:** 2009 **PUBLISHER:** SCEA **DEVELOPER:** SCE Studios Japan

Explaining the mechanics of the original *LocoRoco* to the non-initiated is likely an exercise in frustration. Its visual style, use of music, shapes, and colors really defies description and definition. But it was successful enough to see the developers craft a much larger *LocoRoco* experience with its first true sequel. In fact, it's utterly massive.

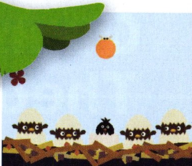
The Moja have returned, and have learned to sing a terrifying new song that can suck the world dry of its vigor, and it's your goal to team up with the various LocoRoco to regain the energy that's been lost.

Moving LocoRocos around levels is still done by tilting the world. However, LocoRoco can now learn new actions such as biting on certain plants to jump, swing, and bounce, or the ability to pull things out of holes to help access different areas. LocoRoco can also now hide in crevices or behind objects to avoid becoming lunch, as well as roll, hop, and ride in other creatures—such as in an afro or an enemy crab's shell—to defeat enemies or access secret areas.

Although there will only be 25 new stages in *LocoRoco 2* (less than the original) each level is more packed with content. After meeting certain conditions you'll open up a new quest that will have different goals, or uncover a hidden boss battle. Levels will also have plenty of secret areas to unlock as well by stopping Mui Mui's new spiky red haired rivals the Bui Bui from terrorizing your friends.

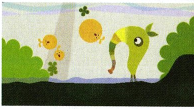
LocoRoco 2 will feature a host of new mini-games including Nyokki Nyonyokki, a pseudo Whack-A-Mole type game and Bui Bui Bwooooon!, a 2D shooter-lite. You'll still decorate and manipulate the Mui Mui house, but you'll also have to defend it from Bui Bui attacks. If that's not enough, you can play along with three other friends in an all-new ad-hoc multiplayer mode called LocoRider.

Billy Berghammer



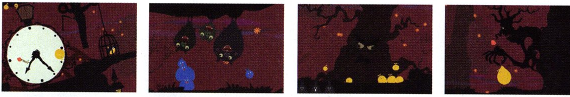
Can you spot the LocoRoco in this picture?

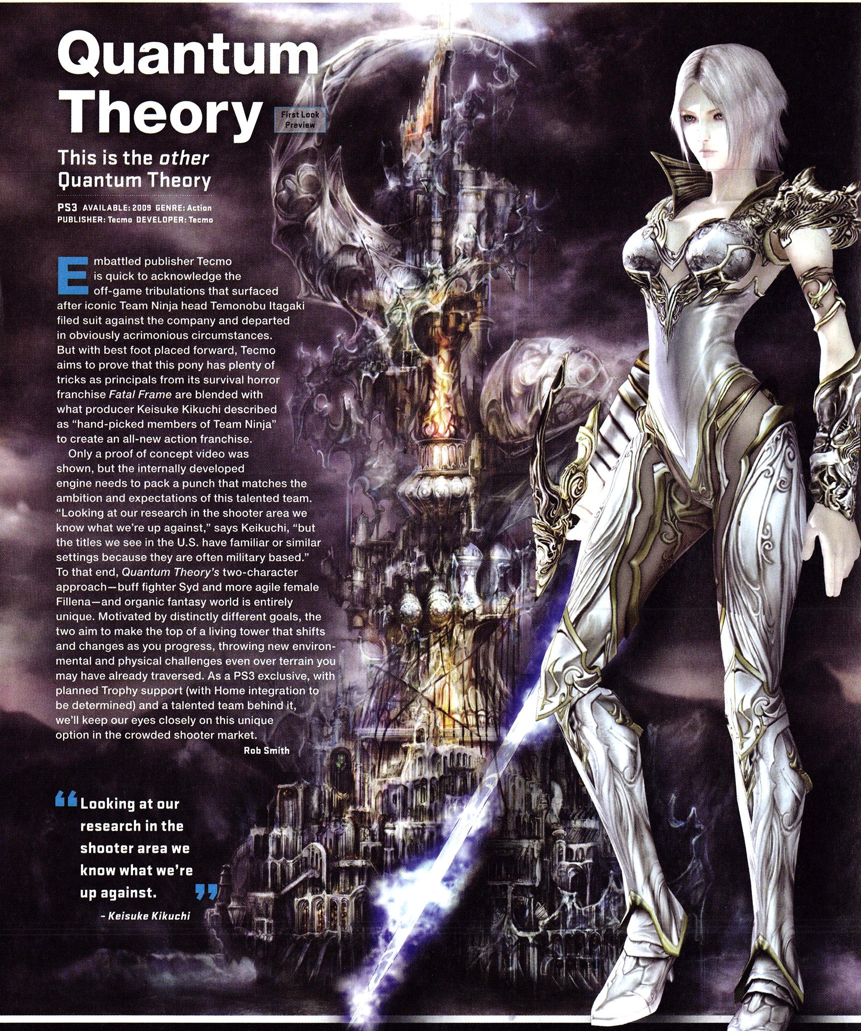
Unearthing turnips never got us *this* excited.



Expect to meet plenty of bizarre but helpful creatures as you tilt your way through the world.

▼ While *LocoRoco 2* is pretty cute overall, its darker stages ramp up the creep factor with weird monsters and environments.





Quantum Theory

First Look Preview

This is the *other* Quantum Theory

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** 2009 **GENRE:** Action
PUBLISHER: Tecmo **DEVELOPER:** Tecmo

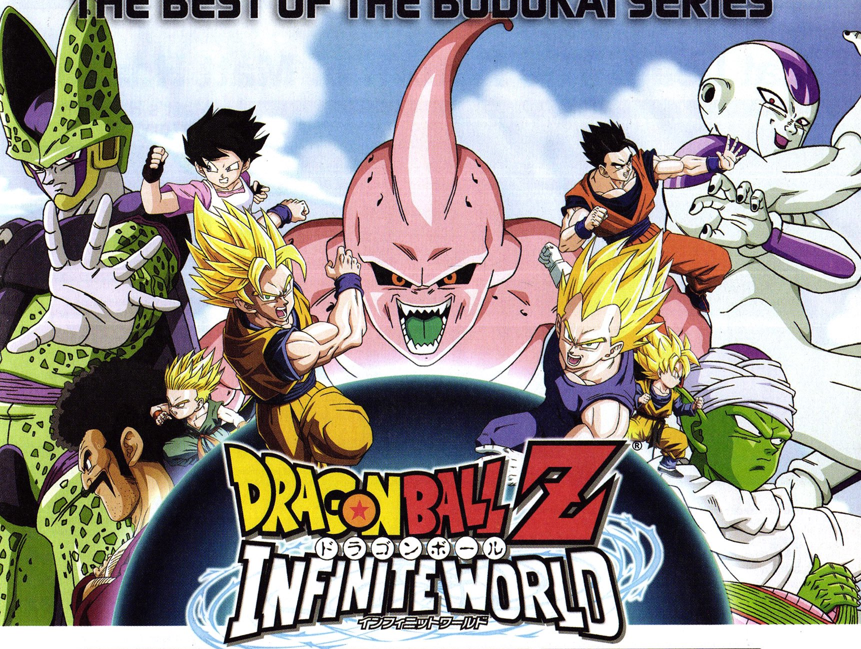
Embattled publisher Tecmo is quick to acknowledge the off-game tribulations that surfaced after iconic Team Ninja head Temonobu Itagaki filed suit against the company and departed in obviously acrimonious circumstances. But with best foot placed forward, Tecmo aims to prove that this pony has plenty of tricks as principals from its survival horror franchise *Fatal Frame* are blended with what producer Keisuke Kikuchi described as "hand-picked members of Team Ninja" to create an all-new action franchise.

Only a proof of concept video was shown, but the internally developed engine needs to pack a punch that matches the ambition and expectations of this talented team. "Looking at our research in the shooter area we know what we're up against," says Keikuchi, "but the titles we see in the U.S. have familiar or similar settings because they are often military based." To that end, *Quantum Theory's* two-character approach—buff fighter Syd and more agile female Fillena—and organic fantasy world is entirely unique. Motivated by distinctly different goals, the two aim to make the top of a living tower that shifts and changes as you progress, throwing new environmental and physical challenges even over terrain you may have already traversed. As a PS3 exclusive, with planned Trophy support (with Home integration to be determined) and a talented team behind it, we'll keep our eyes closely on this unique option in the crowded shooter market.

Rob Smith

> **"Looking at our research in the shooter area we know what we're up against."**
>
> *- Keisuke Kikuchi*

THE BEST OF THE BUDOKAI SERIES


DRAGON BALL Z®
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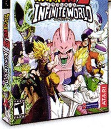
INFINITE WORLD
インフィニットワールド

TIME 00'00"00

6 DMG.
FIRST ATTACK


PlayStation 2
DRAGON BALL Z
INFINITE WORLD
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- THE FINAL BATTLE ON PLAYSTATION® 2 IS BIGGER THAN EVER
- ATTACK WITH OVER 40 DIFFERENT FIGHTERS WITH MORE THAN 100 TRANSFORMATIONS
- EXPLORE 136 NEW DRAGON MISSIONS AND SCENARIOS FROM THE ANIME
- EXPERIENCE 6 UNIQUE GAME MODES AND MASTER YOUR FIGHTING STYLE

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Cartoon Violence
Tobacco Reference

PlayStation® 2

FUNIMATION® ENTERTAINMENT
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TOEI ANIMATION

BANDAI®

BANDAI NAMCO Games™

ATARI

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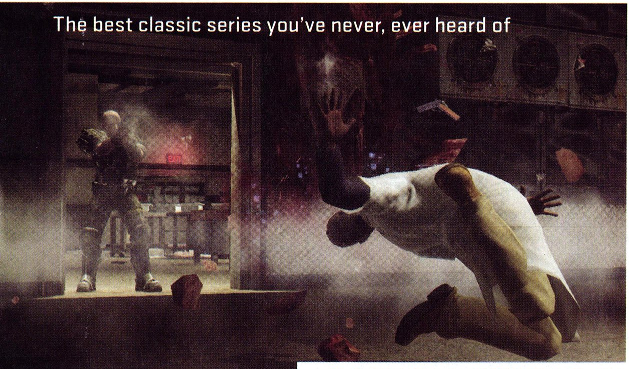
Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard

The best classic series you've never, ever heard of



Talk about talent. Will Arnett and Neil Patrick Harris will lend their voices, and Dave Ellis (writer of *Dead Head Fred)* is penning the story.

PS3 AVAILABLE: Q1 2009 GENRE: Third-person shooter PUBLISHER: D3Publisher DEVELOPER: Vicious Cycle

Bet you 10 bucks you've never heard of one of my all-time favorite videogame characters, Matt Hazard. Just don't get me started on that trademark sexy bald head. Admit it: you have no idea who he is.

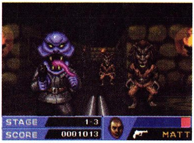
Instead of sending me those crisp bills (to the usual PTOM address), educate yourself by reading about the franchise's history. I mean it. Go on. *(Now,* dammit! And don't come back until you're well-versed in Mr. Hazard's past.)

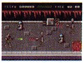
All but the most gullible should now understand why they've never heard of Matt Hazard; it's because *Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard* is the first and only game starring the "legendary" Matt Hazard. Those overblown historical credentials come straight from the developer-created *fictional* backstory, crafted to introduce the game's protagonist, a retired videogame character who's just been asked to star in a new game. That's right; the folks at Vicious Cycle fooled us. (Go to www.weaponsofmattdestruction.com to see how far they took the gag.)

If you're still confused, *Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard* is a third-person shooter that consistently and humorously breaks the fourth wall (that division between game-world character and real-world references). As Matt Hazard, a videogame character starring as, you got it, a videogame character, you uncover a sinister plot where "hackers" are changing the code by dredging up enemies from Matt's old games in order to kill him. With "only" a QA tester to help, Matt somehow has to discover a way to survive.

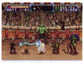
Developer Vicious Cycle is confident that the humorous bent won't undermine its ability to produce a game that stands up to any other third-person shooter on the market. The *Uncharted*-style duck-and-shoot system, an innovative point-and-cover technique (where you point your onscreen crosshair to automatically direct Matt to safe cover), and an impressive physics engine should provide the necessary gameplay depth to bolster the comedic plot. So loosen up and get ready to meet characters like Master Chef, Sting Sniperscope, and of course, the wry Matt Hazard. Teresa Dun

Matt's Hazardous History



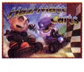


Matt's a lucky ol' dog. Few videogame characters have enjoyed a career so spicy. From his 1983 launch in *The Adventures of Matt in Hazard Land* (an 8-bit side-scrolling arcade shooter)…



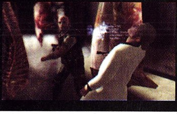
…to his role in the 1990 classic *Conflict of the Deities (Featuring Matt Hazard),* a 16-bit title "featuring Matt Hazard" as a time traveler who saves mythological Greece using his futuristic weapons, Matt's roles have always been satisfyingly robust. Arguably, no videogame hero has been as varied and prolific.

And don't forget his critically hailed 1992 FPS *Matt Hazard 3D* or the 1993 import title *Goonzilla Versus Mega-Matt.* Matt's last decent title was *Matt Hazard: Alien Assassination Arena* in 1999.

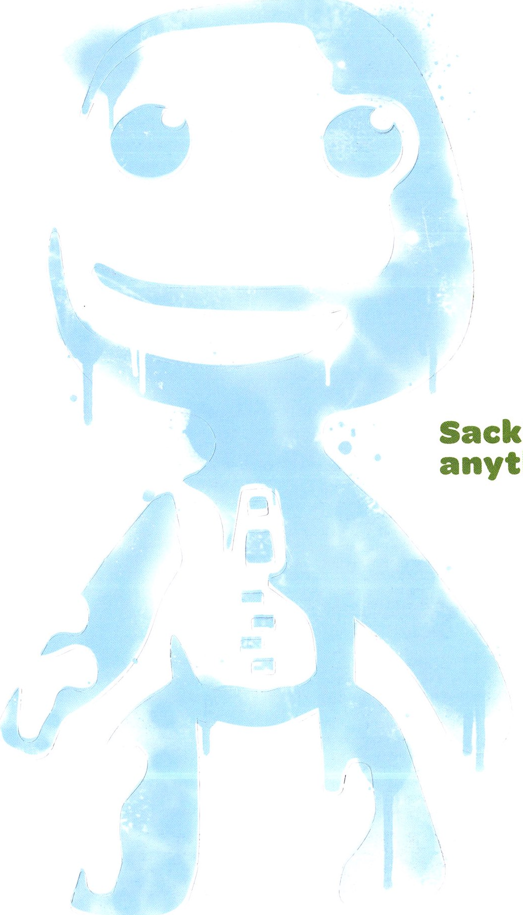


After that, Matt's career tanked. Desperate to reinvigorate his status in the videogame market, Matt got involved in such dubious projects as *Haz-Matt Carts* (a cute racing/shooting game) and *Choking Hazard: Hard Candy* (in which he played a bat-wielding "policeman" in a world full of colorful piñatas). Bad decisions. Both games tanked, and Matt's been in a pathetic, lonely retirement ever since. Until now.

Butchers, and Zombies, and Cowboys, oh YES!

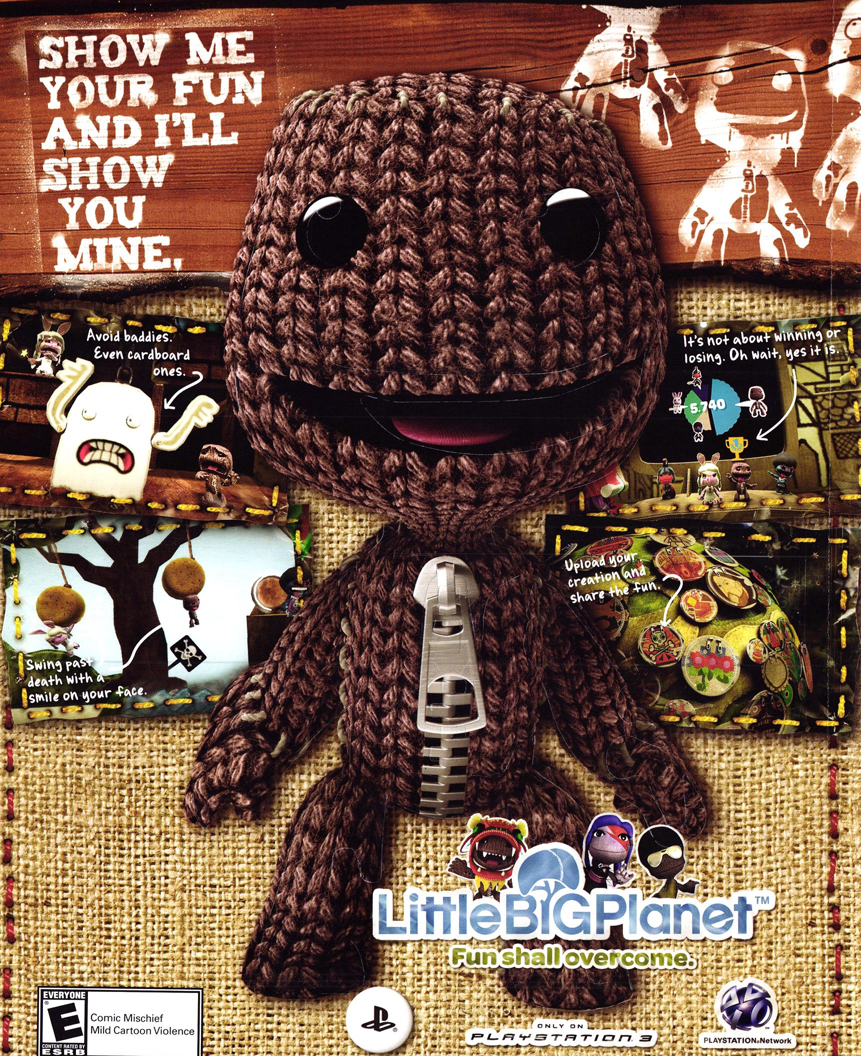


In the sub-20-minute demo I attended, Matt navigated a butcher shop full of knife-wielding cooks and gun-totin' mafia men, mutilated a dozen zombies (the chefs turned into the undead after a hacker glitches the code), and quieted the itchy fingers of dual-pistoled cowboys. Chaotic! That's just a glimpse of Vicious Cycle's ambition level. (Robo-femmes and space marines are rumored to make an appearance as well!)



SackBoy-ize anything.*

*Just be sure it's your anything. For example: Stenciling SackBoy onto your skateboard? Great. Your T-shirt? Perfect. Your dog? Questionable. Your neighbor's new car? Definitely not.


SHOW ME YOUR FUN AND I'LL SHOW YOU MINE.
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It's not about winning or losing. Oh wait, yes it is.
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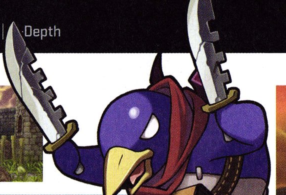
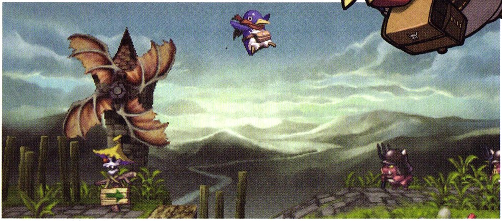


One Prinny enters, takes one hit, and croaks. Repeat up to 999 times, as needed.



That special hero-red scarf is the only thing keeping this inbound dood from exploding on impact, dood.

"Yo, One-Hit-Point—guard this roomful of priceless treasure for me for a sec, would you?"

Even the most jaded among us aren't immune to the Prinny's penguiney charm: http://penny-arcade.com/comic/2006/09/01/

Prinny:

Can I Really Be the Hero?

I feel Prinny, oh so Prinny

PSP AVAILABLE: February 2009 GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: NIS America DEVELOPER: NIS

What better sign that you've warmed the cold hearts of videogamers worldwide than to have your own beloved, signature character? Nintendo has the charmingly stereotyped, can-do plumber, Sega the bad-boy blue hedgehog, Square Enix the lovable, smiling slime. And NIS America? The luckless, double-amputee, peg-legged slave, karmic-reject, faux-penguin, front-line peon known as the Prinny. You know—the one that explodes. Long relegated to a supporting—and usually pretty much doomed—role in the *Disgaea* series of whacked-out, turn-based strategy games, the ubiquitous Prinny is finally the star of his own side-scrolling action game. It's really called *Prinny: Can I Really Be the Hero?* and from the title alone, it sounds like some Prinny out there is nervous and hesitant. And dear god, he has reason to be.

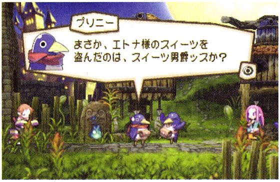
The Prinny's unlikely-hero status—reflected in the subtitle of the Japanese release, which roughly translates as "Is it really okay if I'm the hero, dood?"—is further underscored by his decidedly expendable nature in NIS America's first true action title.

Most games posit a single hero with the ability to absorb an incredible amount of damage; here, you must make do with a single hit point for your Prinny… but you've got a thousand of the poor things ready to obediently, selflessly, Russian-front their way to victory at your command. Like I said—expendable. (It wouldn't really be a true NISA game if there weren't some tragicomically absurd reason for sending battalions of Prinnies off to do or die; in case you're interested, someone has apparently made off with Etna's tasty dessert—read it again: tasty dessert—and now There Will Be Pixels).

Starting each stage from a home base (where one can gather game info, check item-collection stats, save games, and store music tracks collected during gameplay), you venture out into a side-scrolling battlefield composed of 3D backgrounds and highly detailed 2D sprites. Any "active" Prinny can jump, run, slash-attack, and even throw other Prinnies (presumably to inflict explosive damage—oh Prinnies, you short-bus jihadists of the videogaming world!). Use up Prinnies as inefficiently as necessary, as long as you can bludgeon or penguin-wave your way to victory. Stages are broken up by battles with Bosses, whom NIS collectively describes as "idiots who are looking for trouble."

Prinny will employ PSP wireless functionality to send and receive play sessions and to download new boss and level content. It will also offer an Easy mode—in which each Prinny's maximum health is increased to an unprecedented three(!) hit points. It's kind of amazing that it's taken this long for long-suffering Prinnies to get their own game—but now that the floodgates are creaking open, maybe we'll all be saying "Prinny" in the same reverential tone as "Pokemon." And when the Prinnies finally get a *South Park* episode, the world can finally come to an end, dood.

Chris Hudak

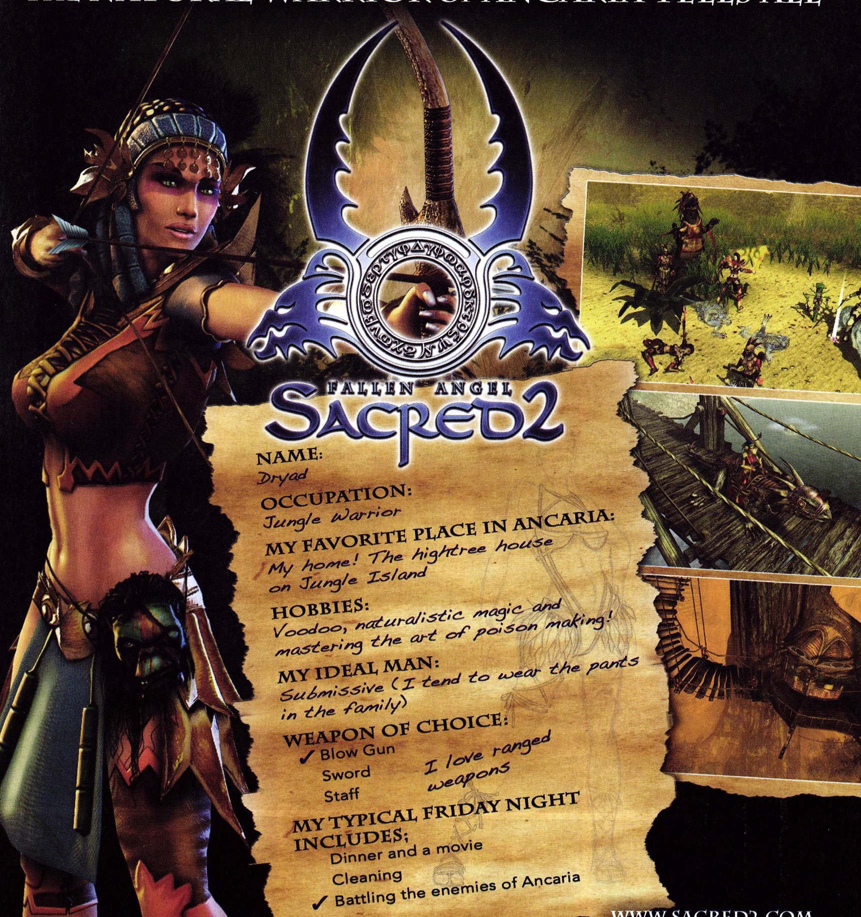


プリニー

まさか、エトナ様のスイーツを盗んだのは、スイーツ男爵ッスか？

Oh, the carnage! And the calories. Only in a Japanese game would so many die over someone's dessert.

THE NATURAL WARRIOR OF ANCARIA TELLS ALL



FALLEN ANGEL SACRED2

NAME:
Dryad

OCCUPATION:
Jungle Warrior

MY FAVORITE PLACE IN ANCARIA:
My home! The hightree house on Jungle Island

HOBBIES:
Voodoo, naturalistic magic and mastering the art of poison making!

MY IDEAL MAN:
Submissive (I tend to wear the pants in the family)

WEAPON OF CHOICE:
- ✓ Blow Gun
- Sword
- Staff

I love ranged weapons

MY TYPICAL FRIDAY NIGHT INCLUDES;
- Dinner and a movie
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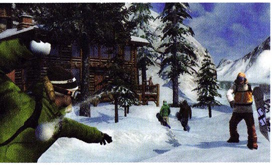
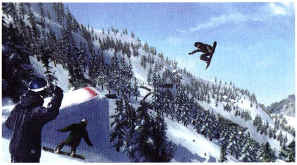
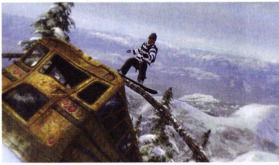


Have fun on and off the board.



Ride mountains populated by real gamers.



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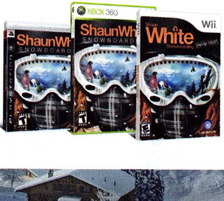

Shaun

White

Snowboarding

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PlayStation Gallery

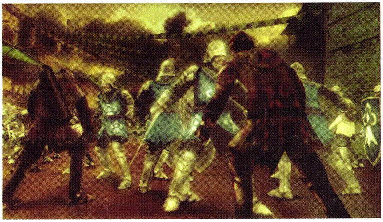
Updates, sneak peeks, works-in-progress

Edge of Twilight First Look

PS3 AVAILABLE: 2009 GENRE: Action
PUBLISHER: SouthPeak Games DEVELOPER: Fuzzyeyes

Don't be surprised if you've never heard of Australia-based developer Fuzzyeyes since its only previous project was the easily missed fast-food strategy effort *Hot Dog King.* Now armed with the Unreal 3 engine, this outfit has constructed a visually impressive setting and slightly hokey story in a yet-to-be-proven third-person action adventure. The fantasy world inhabited by the star character, Lex, comes armed with words like post-apocalyptic and steampunk, but still tries to remain credible. The gameplay mechanic is a two-pronged affair where Lex in the Day Realm interacts with machines and uses guns against the threat, while his night persona (he's the only crossbreed—able to navigate both settings—in this new world order) is more agile, dodges technology (along with enemies), and nimbly navigates seemingly impassible walls and chasms. As enemies pour through rifts to engage in third-person *Devil May Cry*-lite action sequences, Lex can manipulate his environment by slowing time that reveals a grayscale look, with the blood expelled during combat retaining its red viscous and visual identity.

An all-too familiar elevator scene where monsters appeared through rifts didn't display particularly original gameplay design mechanics, but we hope that lead designer Andrew Chrysafidis delivers on his promise to provide "legendary weapons, finishing moves, and combos." RPG-lite options of weapon upgrades and managing of the ether meter that manages the slo-mo mode are all familiar entities in the current third-person action canon, but if combined effectively with these sparkling visuals and hopefully-inventive gameplay puzzle moments, we could have a sleeper hit tunneling up from down under. Rob

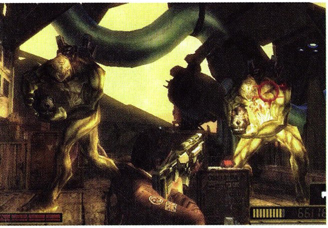


Undead Knights First Look

PSP AVAILABLE: 2009 GENRE: Action-adventure PUBLISHER: Tecmo
DEVELOPER: Tecmo

Who needs freedom if you have the ability to turn enemies into zombies—that you can control—in return for your eternal slavery? As producer Kohei Shibata is quick to point out, this new PSP franchise is "not like other zombie stuff you might have seen…in our game you turn them and use them to overcome challenges." *Undead Knights'* 14th century European-style setting is the scene for—judging from our brief look—*Dynasty Warriors*-like massive action gameplay. The twist is that the to-be-named hero can lead an army of zombies, issuing commands and throwing them into combat. His own weapon can be powered-up over time adding RPG-lite elements, while a strategic acumen is required to turn specific enemy types (bombers, archers, giants) to your zombie horde.

Multiplayer should play a significant role, with a co-op mode allowing four players to command their own zombie armies against a common castle-bound enemy, and a versus mode pitting one zombie commander against another, with upgrades and power-ups earned in these modes carrying back over to your single-player game. Rob



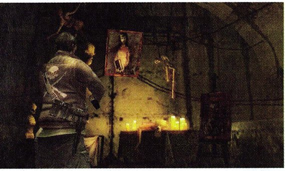
Resistance Retribution Preview Update

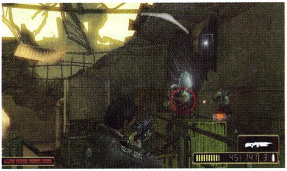
PSP AVAILABLE: Q2 2009 GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Sony Bend

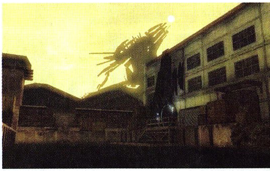
Building on the excellent *Syphon Filter* PSP experience, Sony Bend has, over the past few months, displayed its action gaming acumen with each showing of this *Resistance* title set right between *Fall of Man* and the beginning of *Resistance 2.* But the big news now is the PS3/PSP relationship upgrades that signal new opportunities for integrated game designs, and new possibilities for expanding each experience. With PS3 Connect, if you have *Resistance 2* in your PS3 and connect your PSP to the system it will enable the "Infected" mode. Aside from a new costume for the lead character, James Grayson, it will allow you access to previously inaccessible areas and even changes key gameplay dynamics. In place of the health bar, in Infected mode Grayson has a health regeneration system, he can breathe freely underwater, and also wield the AG44 Magnum weapon from *Resistance 2* (with its alt-fire ability to fire multiple rounds and then explode them at once).

In addition, PSP Plus will allow you to use your PS3 DualShock 3 controller to play *Retribution.* Using the AV cables to transmit the PSP screen onto your TV, you'll be able to use the dual-analog controls, and enjoy a different experience as the aim assist mode is turned off and rumble effects add their own level of interactivity to the experience.

If *Resistance: Fall of Man* was part of your early PS3-owning experience you'll need to add both *Retribution* and *Resistance 2* to your collection. Start saving. Rob



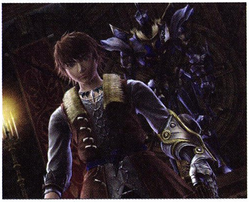


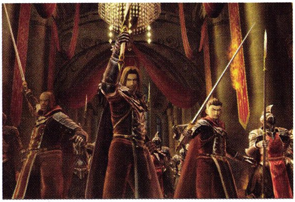


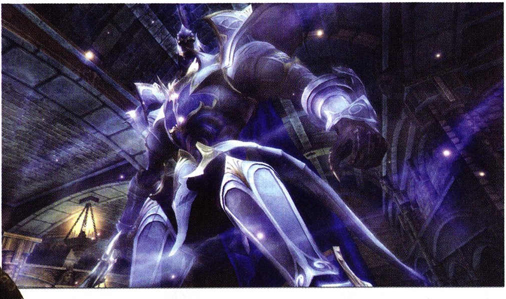
White Knight Chronicles Preview Update

PS3 AVAILABLE: 2009 GENRE: RPG
PUBLISHER: SCEI DEVELOPER: Level-5

It's hard to ignore Level-5's RPG epic-in-the-making with its December release in Japan looming, but that still didn't persuade the developers to reveal any more details of some of its most anticipated features. The RPG that sees the hero, Leonard, transform into a powerful knight (attended by a buddy that you can create and customize for yourself) will have an online mode apparently quite separate from the single-player game. No word on voice chat options—no word on *any* features, really. But the core visuals (and, we suppose, the PowerPoint presentation) hint at a striking, don't-want-to-miss experience. We'll know more come the Japanese release, with the game's North American appearance expected a few months later. Rob







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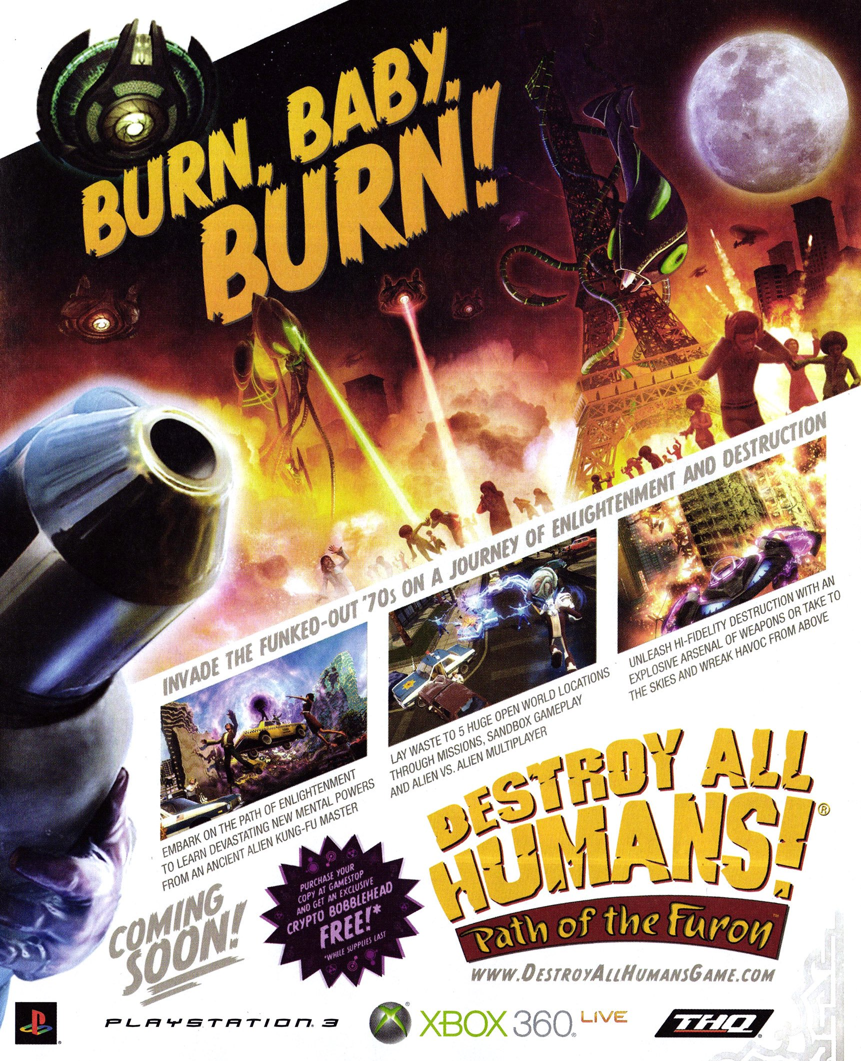

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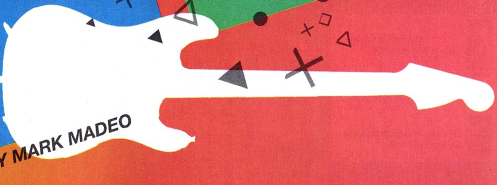
PLAYSTATION: THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE '08

Ever wonder what a HARDCORE GAMER really craves as a holiday gift? Well, besides games, of course...

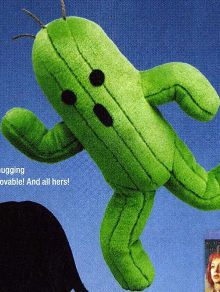
LET'S FACE IT: Gamers have all kinds of diverse and quirky tastes when it comes to anything outside their beloved pastime. So rather than filling up a few pages with a standard guide highlighting the same exact games as everyone else, the PTOM editors cobbled together their ultimate wish lists and placed them under our non-denominational holiday tree, only to wake up the following morning awash with goodies. Following are our some of our favorite holiday gadgets, gizmos, books, and plushies, along with a few interesting surprises.

And lest you worry, we've also got games in there—25 in all, including each editor's personal pair of perfect picks. Let the gift giving commence!



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK MADEO

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE '08



SQUARE ENIX FINAL FANTASY SERIES PLUSH CACTUAR | $17.99
WWW.SQUARE-ENIX-SHOP.COM
Teresa has played so many *Final Fantasy* games and adored cactuars for so long that, for her, hugging this plushie is like hugging a celebrity. So soft. So green. So utterly lovable! And all hers!

SQUARE ENIX FINAL FANTASY TRADING ARTS MINI SET VOL. 1 | $16.99
WWW.SQUARE-ENIX-SHOP.COM
Cloud, Rinoa, Yuna, and Vaan, small enough to sit on a desk and inspire all sorts of fan fiction.

TERESA'S a fighter not a lover. Nothing makes her holidays more festive than giving some punk a good ass-kicking.

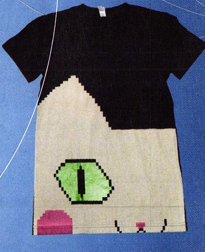
GAMES
Tizzy's favorite flavors

SOULCALIBUR IV
PS3 | $59.99

CRISIS CORE: FINAL FANTASY VII
PSP | $39.99

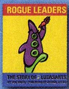
BLU-RAY FAVE

THE FIFTH ELEMENT (REMASTERED) | $28.95
RATED PG-13



GAMEDAR DIGITAL CAT T-SHIRT | $35.00
WWW.GAMEDAR.COM
Sleek, intelligent cuteness embodied in a T-shirt.

SONY OFFICIAL BLUETOOTH HEADSET (FOR PLAYSTATION 3) | $49.99
WWW.US.PLAYSTATION.COM
For those angry nights when Teresa can't sleep…and thus has to talk trash to strangers while gaming online.



ROGUE LEADERS: THE STORY OF LUCASARTS $60.00 | WWW.CHRONICLEBOOKS.COM
"So this is really my Christmas bonus? Um…thanks…but nice work, boss!"

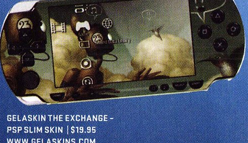
SQUARE ENIX SHIN-RA BUSINESS CARD CASE | $22.99
WWW.SQUARE-ENIX-SHOP.COM
Ah ha! An elegant, subtly game-related business card case that's perfect for impressing suits and game nerds alike.

Gamer on the GO

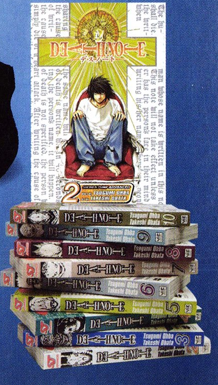
GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS A big hero in a small package, perfect on PSP.

PATAPON Play it with your headphones on to get the maximum joy from this charmer.

STAR OCEAN: FIRST DEPARTURE Old-school RPG goodness, finally available in the States.



GELASKIN THE EXCHANGE – PSP SLIM SKIN | $19.95
WWW.GELASKINS.COM
So my PSP won't be naked!



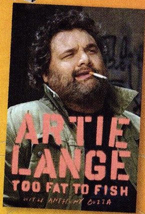
VIZ MEDIA DEATH NOTE – VOL. 1 TO 12
$7.99 PER VOLUME | WWW.VIZ.COM
A tale of intrigue and wits, involving shinigami (Japanese gods of death), their powerful notebooks (write down a person's name and they'll die within minutes), and a struggle for ultimate control of the world. Just the type of story Teresa recommends to brighten anyone's holiday season!

GARY
has a taste for the finer things in life. You may need to pull out your credit card about now.

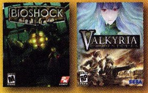
THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN OMNIBUS | $99.99
WWW.MARVEL.COM
Back in the day, Tony Stark had to carry around his armor in a suitcase. Read about his first adventures in this ginormous, high-quality tome. Then pick up some of Marvel's other Omnibus collections, including the awesome *Punisher.*

LEGO STAR WARS ROGUE SHADOW
$49.99 | SHOP.LEGO.COM
What rules more than a Lego Star Wars kit? How about one that's based off the chart-busting game, *The Force Unleashed?*

XIKAR XI3 EXOTIC CUTTER – COCOBOLO | $99.99
XIKAR ENVOY SINGLE CIGAR CASE $29.99 | WWW.XIKAR.COM
Hey, kids: Smoking is bad. But if, like Gary, you do indulge in the occasional high-end stogie, do it in style with this snazzy cocobolo cutter and leather-lined cigar case.



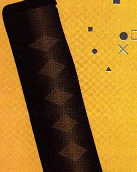
TOO FAT TO FISH | $24.95
WWW.SPIEGELANDGRAU.COM
No, it's not for all the boob jokes that Gary listens to Howard Stern on his commute in every morning. Sidekick and comedian Artie Lang is the real heart of the show, and his demons are laid bare in this brilliant new autobiography.

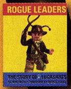


GAMES
Two very different games, two very grand adventures—both of which help redefine their genres. Plus, they've both got tons of replay value!

BIOSHOCK
PS3 | $59.99

VALKYRIA CHRONICLES
PS3 | $59.99





ROGUE LEADERS: THE STORY OF LUCASARTS
$60.00 | WWW.CHRONICLEBOOKS.COM
"Blind we are, if creation of this literary masterpiece we could not see. Work, nice it is, boss!"

WIRELESS STEREO HEADPHONE SYSTEM MDR-DS6000 | $299.99
WWW.SONYSTYLE.COM
All the sound of a high-end headphone without any of those pesky wires? Sony's sleek headgear might be on the pricey side, but the quality and comfort are worth it. Fair warning: The signal can be a bit temperamental until you find the right spot for the base station.

Digital Downloader

PIXELJUNK MONSTERS | $9.99
Don't be fooled by the graphics; this is strategy at its finest.

WIPEOUT HD | $19.99
Fast-paced and utterly gorgeous. Speed freaks, get your fix here.

PAIN | $9.99
The name says it all. Enjoy abusing a hapless character.

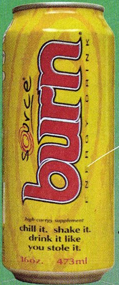
PRINNY PLUSHIE | $19.99
WWW.ROSENQUEEN.COM
According to Gary, you can never have too much plush. Pick up all three Prinnies from NIS America's online store.

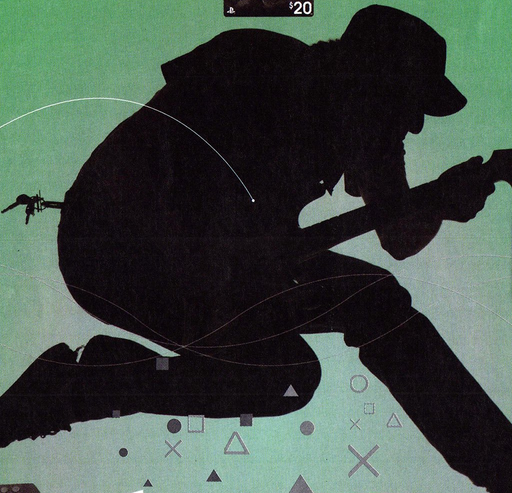
PLUSH BABY CHOCOBO | $10.99
WWW.SQUARE-ENIX-SHOP.COM
Only available at Square Enix's online outlet. Adopt one today. *Kweh!*

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE '08

PSN CARD | $20 OR $50
WWW.US.PLAYSTATION.COM
For indecisive gamers, these cards offer a new, convenient method of purchasing downloadable content. Now available at most Barnes & Noble, Best Buy, Wal-mart, and Sam's Club stores, and various other places you don't want to be inside at the end of November.

SCOTT plays real instruments and reads actual books. Who the hell let him in here?!





BURN ENERGY DRINK
$42.99 (24 CANS)
WWW.SOURCEDRINKS.COM
If you're anything like Scott, you like to wash your gaming down with a great big unnecessary dose of caffeine. And while he doesn't claim this stuff is actually good for you, its vitamins and anti-oxidants do make it somewhat less likely to kill you! Plus, it tastes great.

GAMES
Scott's games rock and roll, in that order. Get it? Get it?!

ROCK BAND 2
PS3, PS2
$59.99 (GAME ONLY); $189.99 (GAME, GUITAR, DRUMS, MIC)

PURE
PS3 | $59.99

HORI SOULCALIBUR IV ARCADE STICK
$49.99 | WWW.HORI.JP/US/
Scott was nearly heart broken when he discovered that Capcom would not actually sell him a *Street Fighter IV* arcade cabinet, but he decided to settle for this well-designed controller and a copy of the game instead. Wait, the game's not out yet?! Noooo!

CHILD'S PLAY GREETING CARDS
$17.99 (12 CARDS)
WWW.CHILDSPLAYCHARITY.COM
Forget to send your holiday greetings in style with these handsome, blank cards from Penny Arcade's Child's Play Charity. All proceeds go directly to the charity, so if want to cut out the middleman, go ahead and just donate. Please.

MIRROR'S EDGE RUNNER'S BAG BUNDLE | $129.95
EASTORE.EA.COM
By the time you read this, all these bags might already be gone, but we salute EA and *Mirror's Edge* nonetheless for such a clever and actually worth-the-price special edition tchotchke. If you can track one down online, do it.

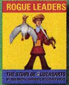
ION DRUM ROCKER | $299.99 | WWW.DRUMROCKER.COM
This is the peripheral to end all peripherals. A high-end, fully adjustable, totally badass drum set designed specifically for *Rock Band 2* (though it's also compatible with the original and, in theory, *Guitar Hero World Tour*). Everything about this set feels authentic, especially the pro-quality pads and kick pedal. Best of all, you can convert it into a real electronic drumkit if you pick up a "drum brain." It's not ready just yet but should launch on the PS3 and PS2 within the next couple months.

Rookie Must-Haves

UNCHARTED: DRAKE'S FORTUNE A movie-quality script and intense gunplay, with gorgeous graphics.

METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOT Duh. Does anyone *not* own this game?

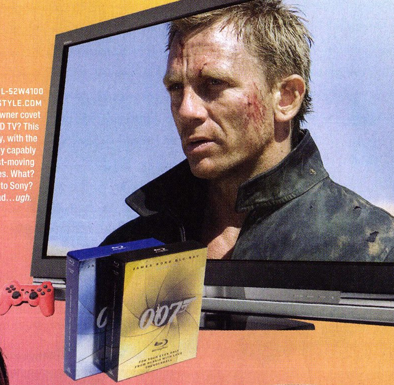
RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN You will want to play this before you tackle the sequel.



ROGUE LEADERS: THE STORY OF LUCASARTS
$60.00 | WWW.CHRONICLEBOOKS.COM
"It's more satisfying than punching Jar Jar Binks in the face. Nice work, boss!"

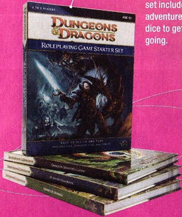
ROB is a published author with an English accent. Ladies: The line starts on the left.

IMPALER | $14.95
WWW.TOPCOW.COM/IMPALER
Written by our friend, William Harms (currently employed writing the story for Sucker Punch's upcoming *inFamous)* this fabulous horror graphic novel telling the tale of the return of Vlad the Impaler is fabulous reading. This six-part trade paperback sets up the story that will continue through regular comic releases.



SONY BRAVIA KDL-52W4100
$2,799 | WWW.SONYSTYLE.COM
Doesn't every PS3 owner covet a big, flat-screen HD TV? This Bravia performs superbly, with the Motionflow technology capably handling the kind of fast-moving images you get in games. What? We need to return this to Sony? Over Rob's dead*…ugh.*

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS STARTER SET | $16.99
WWW.WIZARDS.COM
Everything you need to get started with D&D. And you can do a lot worse this holiday than sit around a table flexing your creative muscle—by that we mean your brain—with this classic tabletop RPG, now repackaged and formatted here for ease-of-accessibility. This box set includes basic rules, adventure, and the dice to get you going.



JAMES BOND BLU-RAY COLLECTIONS
$89.98 EACH | RATED PG
WWW.MGM.COM
Volume 1 includes the full, digitally restored *Dr. No, Die Another Day,* and *Live and Let Die.* Volume 2 delivers *For Your Eyes Only, From Russia With Love,* and *Thunderball.* What else does any right-minded Bond fan need to know? The two three-disc sets are crammed with extras, including commentaries, featurettes, original trailers, and more. No, Mr Bond, I expect you to…buy.

4TH EDITION DUNGEONS & DRAGONS GIFT SET | $104.95
WWW.WIZARDS.COM
Rob won't admit to poring over the three new 4th Edition rulebooks. But we've seen him, hiding behind his screen, rolling dice. And, oddly, grinning maniacally.

PLAYSTATION CUFFLINKS | $150
WWW.CUFFLINKS.COM
How can the stylish dresser ensure his gamer credentials are still on show? How about silver-plated PlayStation controller cufflinks? For the discerning dresser.

REALTRIGGERS FOR PS3 | $4.99
WWW.GIOTECK.COM
Rob's not a retailer, but he endorses these brilliant clip-on triggers that should help ease his R2- and L2-induced carpal tunnel syndrome.

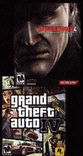
For the Baller

MADDEN NFL 09 Are you ready for some football? It's not just a game; it's annual tradition.

NHL 09 The fastest game on ice may be the best sports videogame around.

MLB 08: THE SHOW The league leader in why Rob turns his copy in late.

SONY PSP MADDEN BUNDLE
$199.99 | SCEA.COM/PSP
One blue PSP 2000. One *Madden NFL 09.* One 1GB Memory Stick Duo. One voucher to download Beats. One *NFL: In Just One Play* video. One good deal for the football fan in your life.



GAMES
The $120 investment in these two games could easily provide several hundred hours of some of the best gaming available on PS3. Absolute slam-dunk, no-miss, must-haves.

METAL GEAR SOLID 4
PS3 | $59.99

GRAND THEFT AUTO IV
PS3 | $59.99

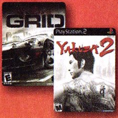
WOMEN'S AUTOBOT TRANSFORMERS T-SHIRT | $20.00 | WWW.80STEES.COM
Rob loves *Transformers.* Rob loves his wife. Now, he won't have to choose one over the other.

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE '08

NYKO MEDIA HUB+
$24.99 | WWW.NYKO.COM
With the latest 80GB and 160GB PS3s sporting just two USB ports and no media card slots, the Media Hub+ is a great stocking stuffer for new PS3 owners.

MAD CATZ
STICK & MIC COFFIN CASE
$24.99 | WWW.MADCATZ.COM
If your band's planning to go on tour, drummers and singers alike will appreciate this stick and mic bag.

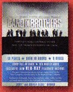
ROGER still loves playing army when he gets the chance. His children often carry loaded weapons.



GAMES
Two that Roger can't get enough of.

GRID
PS3 | $59.99

YAKUZA 2
PS2 | $29.99



BLU-RAYS
"All I want for Christmas is…" War movies?! As inappropriate as that maybe, here's three Blu-rays that Roger wants in his permanent collection.

BAND OF BROTHERS
$99.98 | NOT RATED

PATTON
$34.98 | RATED PG

THE LONGEST DAY
$39.99 | RATED G

SADDLEBACK LEATHER COMPANY
MESSENGER BAG | $329.00
WWW.SADDLEBACKLEATHER.NET
Gamers have tons of stuff, which means they need something to carry it all in. Saddleback bags are uber-high quality and classically beautiful. Roger's messenger bag contents? A PSP, multiple PS3 games, and an issue of PTOM, of course.

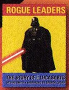
Budget Gamer

ASSASSIN'S CREED It was our game of the year for a reason. (Hint: Because it's very good.)

RATCHET & CLANK FUTURE The best platformer on the system, and great fun for any gamer.

BURNOUT PARADISE Cathartic crash-em-up thrills, with constant downloads to keep it fresh.

G8 PAKUPAKU T-SHIRT
$28.00 | WWW.G8BRAND.COM
Tired of games-themed apparel that's plastered with logos? G8's shirts say "gamer" without screaming "GEEK!"

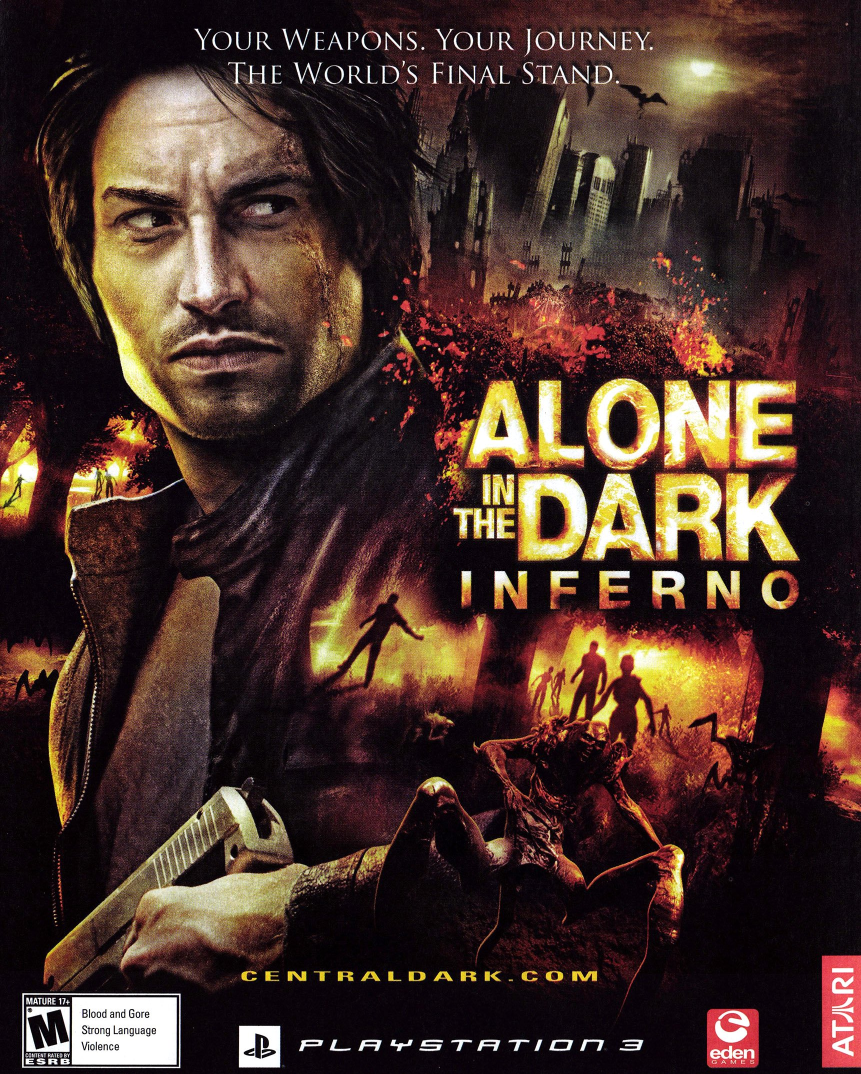


ROGUE LEADERS: THE STORY OF LUCASARTS
$60.00 | WWW.CHRONICLEBOOKS.COM
"I laughed… I cried… It's the feel-good book of the year! Nice work, boss!

MAD CATZ
OFFICIAL ROCK BAND
TRIPLE TREE GUITAR STAND
$29.99 | WWW.MADCATZ.COM
Life can get a little cluttered when you're into music and games. Make moms happy by organizing your axes with the Triple Tree stand.

SHAWNIMALS
$35.00 (GEEKY NINJA); $30.00 (PORK DUMPLING); $18.00 (LONELY DOLLOP)
WWW.SHAWNIMALS.COM
Cute and quirky, Shawnimals prove the Japanese don't hold the patent on cool characters and collectibles.

TAYLOR SOLIDBODY GUITAR | $1,799.00
WWW.TAYLORELECTRICGUITARS.COM
With *Rock Band 2* and *Guitar Hero World Tour* inspiring him to shred, Roger has delusions of stardom dancing in his head. And as he dons the new Taylor and adjusts the strap, we're praying his playing doesn't sound like crap!


YOUR WEAPONS. YOUR JOURNEY.
THE WORLD'S FINAL STAND.
ALONE IN THE DARK
INFERNO
CENTRALDARK.COM
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Strong Language
Violence
PLAYSTATION 3
eden GAMES
ATARI

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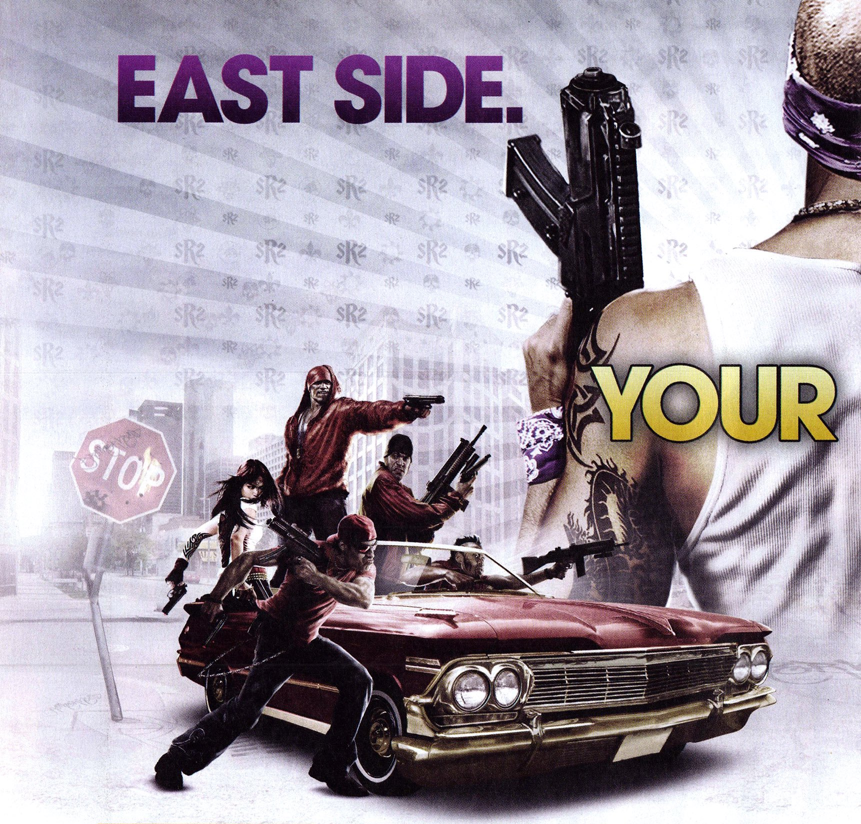

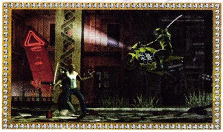

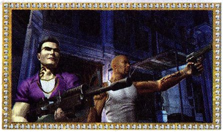

WWW.SAINTSROW.COM

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

- Blood and Gore
- Intense Violence
- Sexual Content
- Strong Language
- Use of Drugs

PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE

PLAYSTATION 3

POWERED BY gamespy

verizonwireless

Available At

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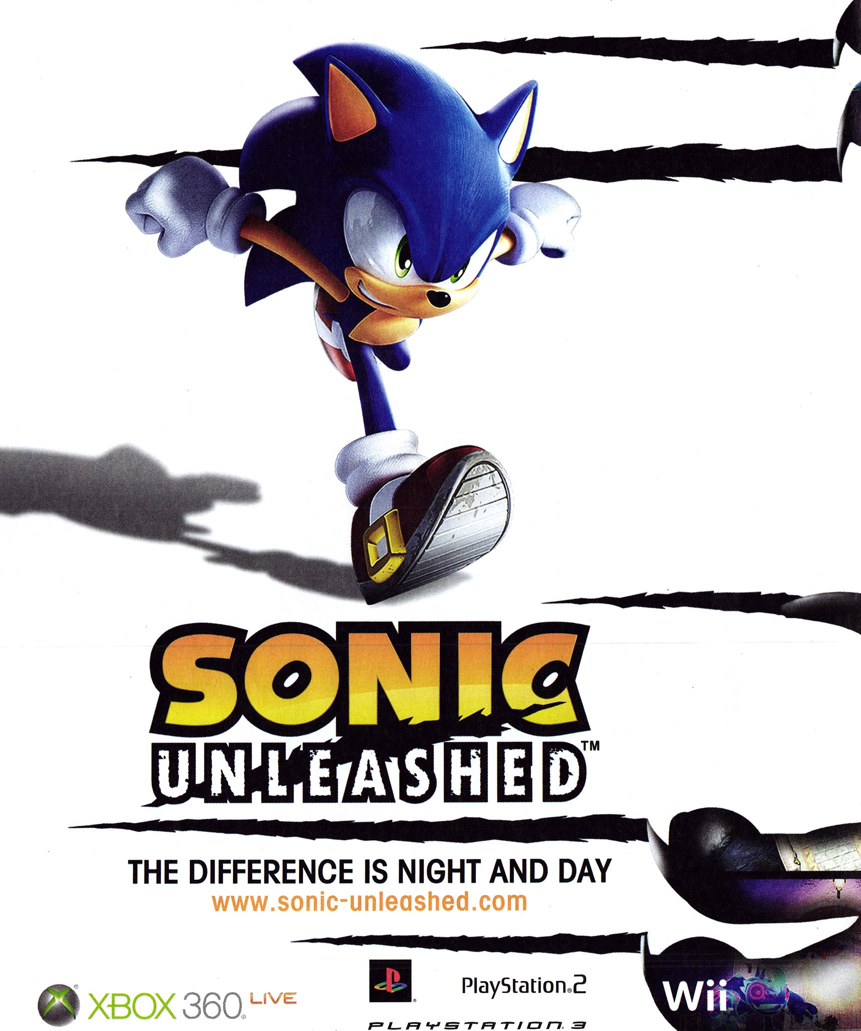
WEST SIDE.
SIDE.
SEP Coming
10.14.08

Saints Row 2™

XBOX 360 LIVE

volition inc

THQ
www.thq.com


SONIC
UNLEASHED™
THE DIFFERENCE IS NIGHT AND DAY
www.sonic-unleashed.com
XBOX 360 LIVE
PlayStation 2
PLAYSTATION 3
Wii

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SEGA®
SONIC TEAM
EVERYONE 10+
E
10+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Animated Blood
Fantasy Violence

ALPHA

GUNS GADGETS ESPIONAGE

BY GARY STEINMAN

Omar Mohammed bin-Nasri stares down the barrel of my gun. With his one good eye the cornered arms dealer looks me over, then defiantly asks what I plan to do next. The missiles have already been sold. I've killed all his guards. Nasri doesn't know who exactly bought these deadly armaments. (Perhaps you should have killed *them* instead of my men, he wryly suggests.) And now my handler is whispering suggestions about what we ought to do with this mercenary scum.

But it's not up to him—or anyone else, for that matter. I'm the deep-cover CIA agent on my own in Saudi Arabia, far behind enemy lines. So far, in fact, that I've already executed the Alpha Protocol, cutting all official ties to my government. And now I'm embroiled in a convoluted conspiracy that will take me around the world, as I seek out what went wrong in a previous mission, pitting various factions against each other in service of my investigation.

ACTION, REACTION

In the blink of an eye, I will make a decision that will alter everything around me. I have three options: I can arrest Nasri, execute him on the spot, or extort him before setting him free. What I don't have is time to dally on this decision; the clock is always ticking. But no matter what I choose, it will have real consequences.

I am playing *Alpha Protocol,* and I'm the first civilian to ever take control of embattled agent Michael Thorton. In my exclusive PS3 playtest, I have intimidated guards, sniped at soldiers, skulked in shadows, and sprayed submachine gun rounds in tight quarters overrun with hostile militia. And I have talked—a lot. I have used my charm, my confidence, and my arrogance to sweet-talk, reason, and bully my way into and out of all kinds of sticky situations. I have developed Thorton's skills and abilities, first as a sneaky field agent, but later as a trigger-happy soldier. I have adjusted to situations, and I have changed the way I play the game—with the world changing around me in equal proportion.

This original, stylish modern-day espionage roleplaying experience is months away from release but is already shaping up to be one of the best RPGs of 2009.

PLATFORM: PS3
AVAILABLE: SPRING 2009
GENRE: ACTION RPG
PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT

PROTOCOL

JACK BAUER JASON BOURNE JAMES BOND

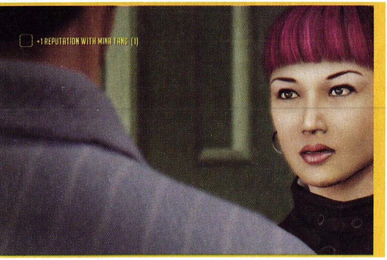
FIELD AGENT SOLDIER TECH SPECIALIST

WHAT KIND OF SPY ARE YOU?

Once you're spotted by an enemy, he will remain on active alert. At that point your stealth days are pretty much over, so why not rush out and show your foe a fistful of love?

SPY GAME

Take a quick look at the screens on this page and you'd be forgiven if you mistake *Alpha Protocol* for yet another third-person action-shooter. You'd be forgiven because you'd be partly right. *Alpha Protocol's* action elements borrow bits and bobs from the best out there: frenetic gunplay along the lines of *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune,* stealth that mimics *Metal Gear Solid,* close-quarters combat that you might find in *Splinter Cell.* So, while this is indeed an action game, it's also something altogether different.



Mina might seem normal enough, but *Alpha Protocol* has its share of quirky characters. "We used a *Kill Bill* test," Parker explains. "If a character fits in *Kill Bill,* that's probably too over-the-top. But we don't want them to be just normal suits. That'd be really boring. I don't know how many M60 wielding psychopath blonde girls there are, but there's one in our game!"

Alpha Protocol is an RPG—and not just in name. This isn't a case of wedging in a branching pathway half an hour before the game ends, or giving you the illusion of choice thanks to meaningless dialogue trees. Here you genuinely choose how to play, both when it comes to the pure action (see "What kind of operative are you?" for more on that) and when it comes to how you push the story through every single one of your interactions.

"A lot of games are reactive because they branch at the end but still use the story as a framing mechanism," explains Tim Ernst, the game's producer at Sega. "In *Alpha Protocol,* we want to make the journey along the way interactive and branch wherever we can with the different people we're interacting with. It's all about the different opportunities to change the story and make a choice like a spy would have."

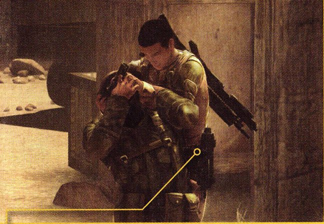
Take my encounter with Nasri. If I arrest him, I'd gain some points with my clandestine handlers back in the CIA—but I might never find out whom Nasri sold the missiles to. If I shoot him, the boys back home would be mighty pissed, but I'd gain some credibility among any of the dozen or so criminal-underworld factions, changing the way later missions might unfold. So I opted for a third path: I took all his money along with the account codes for his Saudi holdings, then gave him a swift boot to the rear. In this scenario, I not only nabbed some extra loot, but I'll also receive discounts on select weapons later in the game. Nasri is an arms dealer, after all.

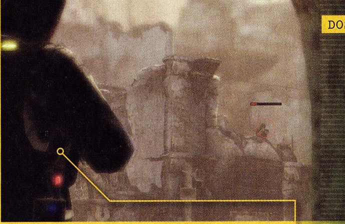
But that's just the short-term benefit; I also need to worry about the longer-term effects of my actions. "Who you align with from a faction perspective—whether you've made friends with one faction over another—determines how you go into the mission, what your actual objectives are going to be, or who's on your side when you get into the mission," explains Christopher Parker, Obsidian's executive producer.

This principle applies equally to every single conversation. Whenever you chat with anyone, you have a split second to choose a "stance" when it's your turn to talk. In general, the three stances can be described as suave, professional, or aggressive—but they can change significantly depending on the situation. Your choices will alter not only the direction of the conversation, but your reputation as well. The results can be immediate, like when I first entered Nasri's hideout and selected an "aggressive" stance with the outside guards, using my bravado to avoid violence and bluff my way past them. (I could have just as easily chosen a different stance that would've ended in violence—or I could have simply ended the conversation and drawn my gun. Again, the choice is mine.) The results can also play into a larger strategy. Perhaps you'll want to annoy an ally in order to gain reputation with a mutual foe. Or perhaps you'll want to befriend an enemy in order to begin a romance with a third party. Every bit of changing reputation with one individual will ripple through the game in inconspicuous ways that you might only piece together much later—or on a second playthrough. Keep in mind, though, that whatever you choose to say, you're stuck with it. Unlike many other roleplaying games, you can't simply repeat conversations until you get the result you like. Say the wrong thing and you might feel the chill of a cold-shoulder from a hot body you've been pursuing. Really push someone's buttons and you could end up in a gunfight, killing off a major character and triggering another major branch in the storyline. Or you might simply find yourself sending subtle ripples throughout your world by making the right gesture at the right moment.

"RPGs sometimes have dialogue choices where you have to go to an extreme in order to see something cool," Ernst says. In *Alpha Protocol,* he suggests, even standard responses should trigger interesting reactions. "To piss someone off is a cool reaction; to stay neutral is a different kind of reaction; and to be on their side is a totally different thing. It's all about branching. Every dialogue choice is a fully branching part of the dialogue. Some of them are more lenient where you're not going to affect your reputation. But we really put in a lot of time so you have a choice between pissing someone off once you figure out the kind of attitude they like, staying neutral, or becoming more friendly with them."

It all comes down to customizing your experience, both from a pure gameplay and a story perspective, creating an utterly unique experience that should captivate action aficionados and roleplaying fanatics alike.





WHAT KIND OF OPERATIVE ARE YOU?

Alpha Protocol eschews a traditional class system, allowing you to apply your Advancement Points to whichever of the 10 categories you choose. As you gain AP and level up your various skills, you'll be awarded with perks, both in the form of passive buffs and special abilities. Think of these power-ups as the modern-day equivalent of magic, helping you pull off unthinkable moves or survive against unfathomable odds.

Since you can't level-grind—you've only got a set amount of AP available, and you can't replay missions just to level up—you'll have to make some tough choices. Sure you can develop a well-rounded but underpowered agent, but it's better to excel in at least a few key categories, especially since you'll unlock the best abilities only at the very end of a skill tree. To make it easier, *Alpha Protocol* starts you off with the choice of one of three archetypes, helping you hone your progress in a direction best suited to your style of play.

Field Agent

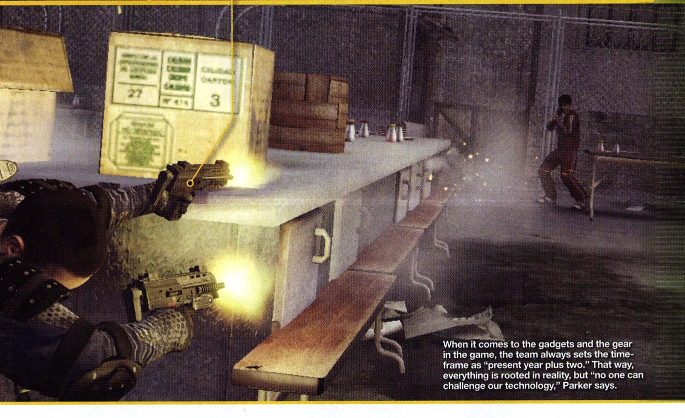
I thought I was the stealthy type, the kind of guy who gets his kicks lurking in shadows and creeping behind bushes. If that sounds swell to you, then the Field Agent is the archetype to begin with, placing an initial focus on categories like Pistol (pick off foes with a silenced headshot), Infiltration, and Stealth. You might also want to toss some AP toward Martial Arts, for close-quarters combat. Truth told, the one-shot stealth kills and slick takedowns are pretty darn satisfying, but I soon found myself gravitating toward a more aggressive style of gameplay…

Soldier

Ah, this is more like it. Kicking down doors and spraying hot lead…now *that's* a good time! The gunplay is intuitive and intense, but not *too* challenging. Perhaps my favorite moment in my entire playtest occurred when the team loaded me up with AP, and I decided to trick out my Submachine Gun and Toughness categories. That gave me a massive health bar along with the Bullet Storm special move, meaning I could run into crowded room and unleash endless SMG fire (for a limited time) without worrying too much about my hit points. *Man*, that's fun!

Tech Specialist

Like setting up traps? Or just a fan of James Bond during the Roger Moore years? Either way, a Tech Specialist can carry around more gadgets and will have more access to money and loot. Spend it wisely on the right gear so you can pull off fancy maneuvers like placing a remote mine near an explosive container, tossing a noisemaker to draw the attention of your foes, then setting off an explosion that'll wipe out several soldiers at once. Though I didn't see it during my playtest, I also heard whispers of psychotic gadgets—ones that can set the enemy soldiers against each other…



When it comes to the gadgets and the gear in the game, the team always sets the time-frame as "present year plus two." That way, everything is rooted in reality, but "no one can challenge our technology," Parker says.

DOSSIER: THE DEVELOPER

Obsidian Entertainment is on the move.

Our agent was last spotted surrounded by a small phalanx of Obsidian loyalists. Leading the group: Christopher Parker, Obsidian's executive producer and COO. Under the guise of a guided tour, Parker quickly escorts our agent through the dark hallways of interconnected but inchoate office spaces. Our agent observes:

SIGNS OF RAPID GROWTH

The offices are not all within one suite, but sprawl through several separate suites in the same building. Obsidian started in 2003 with just five charter members but now numbers around 150. Continued expansion is likely.

SIGNS OF SUDDEN MOVEMENT

Within six weeks of his initial visit to Obsidian, our agent expects the developer to relocate to an upgraded HQ while maintaining all operations on *Alpha Protocol*, a new *Aliens* roleplaying game, and several other projects. This is indeed a formidable and organized operation.

SIGNS OF A WELL-FED FORCE

Our agent reports that all the hallways carry the strong yet comforting aroma of Lipton Chicken Noodle Cup-a-Soup.

These latest observations confirm our suspicions about Obsidian Entertainment. Despite an earlier alliance with the PC and Xbox, on which this developer delivered two well-received sequels to popular RPGs *(Neverwinter Nights 2* and *Knights of the Old Republic II)*, Obsidian is finally, inevitably, encroaching into PlayStation territory with *Alpha Protocol*. Parker has been overheard as being optimistic about his reception into this once-forbidden realm. Transmission from our agent follows:

> I think the type of game that we make—pretty much a Western roleplaying game, and in this case a game that's got a lot of action mixed in with the roleplaying elements—I just don't think there's games like that on the PlayStation right now. If there are, there certainly aren't very many of them… [TRANSMISSION GARBLED] We make these very, very story-based, big-character roleplaying games. It's a good title for the PlayStation because there's just not much like it.

After this transmission, we lost all contact with our agent, who appears to have been shuttled into a dark room with a top-secret working build of the *Alpha Protocol*. He has not yet emerged, but other agents are on standby to pull him out as soon as it is safe.

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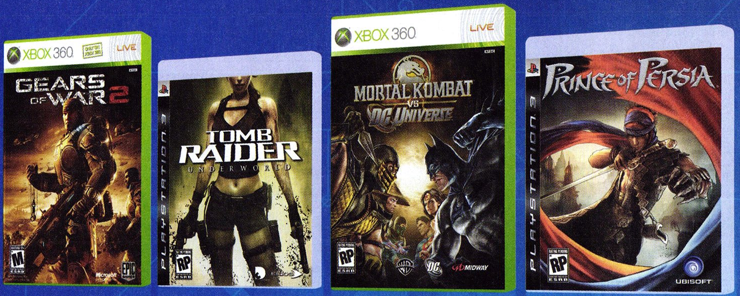
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PlayStation 2: A Holiday Story

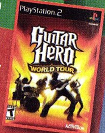
BY DAVID CRADDOCK

For those about to Rock

Tired of seeing your living room blanketed in gaudy wrapping paper and hand-knitted sweaters after the conclusion of Christmas morning festivities? Clear away the debris, break out the guitars, and challenge your family to a rhythm game marathon—with your choice of future Christmas gifts on the line, of course.

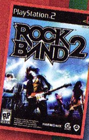
Guitar Hero: World Tour

Whether you're eager to strain your vocal cords, pound on the drums, or strum chords like a rock star, *Guitar Hero: World Tour* will sate all your musical cravings. The complete *Band Kit* edition retails for $179.99, but if you only need your guitar thirst quenched, tell Santa he'll only have to plunk down $89.99 for the *Guitar Kit* package, or $49.99 for the game disc and nothing but.



Rock Band 2

Shower soloists, finger drummers and air guitarists rejoice: Harmonix is back with a follow-up to its 2007 holiday hit. The *Rock Band 2 Special Edition* includes all instruments for $139.99, while a stand-alone version of the game will cost $49.99.



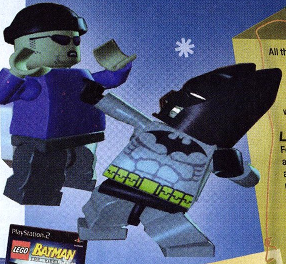
Extended Wish List: *SingStar Country, SingStar Pop Vol. 2, SingStar Legends*

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house,

Not a peripheral was stirring, not even the mouse.
The PlayStation 2 discarded without care,
As gamers embraced PS3, its Blu-ray air.
But jolly Saint Nick, came down the chimney so stealthy,
To scatter new PS2 games and Greatest Hits so healthy.
Whether LEGO Batman, God of War II, *or* SingStar Country,
This holiday is guaranteed to make PS2 gamers joll-ee.
So turn away the naysayers, don't listen to the hate,
Read our guide to PS2 gaming, strong in '08.

HOLY BOUNTIFUL BUNDLE, BATMAN!

If you've gone eight years without a PlayStation 2, now is definitely the time to take the plunge. The *LEGO Batman PS2* bundle includes the slim version of Sony's classic gaming console along with *LEGO Batman,* a fun beat-'em-up for one or two players. Good thing it's cheap: you've got eight years of great games to catch up on!



$149.99
PlayStation 2
LEGO BATMAN

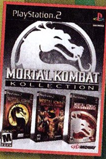
Let's Get Ready to Rumble!

All the adults have passed out on the couch after binging on holiday ham and deviled eggs, leaving you, your little brother, and swarms of rowdy cousins to fight over the controllers. No worries: These action games will provide enough head thumping for everyone. Hey, put down the controller—that's not what we meant!

LEGO Batman

Featuring LEGO humor, drop-in-drop-out cooperative gameplay, and a plethora of Batman trivia and characters, fans of Batman and beat-'em-ups alike will find lots to love in the seedy, blocky underbelly of this LEGO-built Gotham City.

Fighting game fans rejoice: some of the industry's most renowned combos, fireballs, and fatalities are now available in omnibus editions.

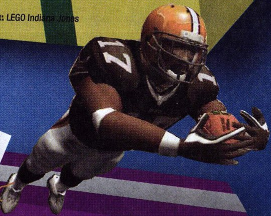


Mortal Kombat Kollection "kollects" *MK Deception, Shaolin Monks,* and *Armageddon* for only **$29.99.**

SNK Arcade Classics contains *Burning Fight, Art of Fighting, Baseball Stars 2,* and *Fatal Fury* at the budget price of **$19.99.**

Fatal Fury: Battle Archives Vol. 2 gathers *Real Bout Fatal Fury, Real Bout Fatal Fury Special,* and *Real Bout Fatal Fury 2: The Newcomers* for **$14.99.**

Extended Wish List: *LEGO Indiana Jones*



Hut... Hut... Play!

As sports game developers shift their focus to the PS3, many PS2 owners may feel left out of the fun. Huddle up, sports fans: while it doesn't boast the new features and shiny graphics of PS3 titles, the PS2 is still capable of providing decent sports simulations at reasonable price points.

NCAA Football 2009, Madden NFL 09

This year's PS2 iterations of *NCAA* and *Madden* are decidedly average, but working in their favor is a price tag of $39.99. We know football fanatics will purchase both, but what about the casual sports fan who wants to narrow his choice down to one? Honestly, each game offers nothing fresh beyond updated rosters and EA's new Family Play mechanics, which provide a helping hand to beginners. Both games provide a decent pigskin experience, so the decision comes down to your personal preference: college ball or the pros.

NBA 2K9

The outdoors may still be a winter wonderland, but gamers lucky enough to score *NBA 2K9* can spend Christmas morning shooting hoops to their hearts' content.

Extended Wish List: *UEFA Euro 2008*

I Stand Alone

The droves of pesky Christmas relatives will go home eventually. Once your gaming area is free of invaders, pop in some of these single-player delights.

Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

While not as smooth nor as graphically compelling as the PS3 version, *The Force Unleashed* on PS2 still provides an action-packed *Star Wars* experience, with original content and multiplayer modes. It's certainly one of the most well-produced PS2 games of the year.

Yakuza 2

It doesn't get any dirtier than the underworld of the Japanese Yakuza. Fans of the original's emphasis on brawling will be pleased to learn that there are even more ways to shatter faces this time around, and at the heart of the violence is a strong narrative that pumps life into the gritty adventure. Plus, as a value proposition it's hard to pass up the potential 100-plus hours of underworld shenanigans and mini-games.

Kingdom Hearts RE: Chain of Memories

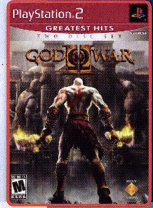
If you didn't follow Sora, Goofy, and Donald's escapades on the Game Boy Advance, *RE: Chain of Memories* is your chance to experience the adventure in full 3D. Previously a Japan-only title, this excellent remake of the GBA game will be available in early December.

Extended Wish List: *Wall-E, Kung Fu Panda*

GHOSTS OF CHRISTMAS PAST

Thanks to SCEA's ever-expanding Greatest Hits Library, some of PS2's best games are available for $20 or less:

- *Resident Evil 4*
- *God of War*
- *God of War II*
- *Kingdom Hearts*
- *Kingdom Hearts II*
- *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*
- *Shadow of the Colossus*
- *Grand Theft Auto III*
- *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*
- *Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters*
- *Jak & Daxter: The Precursor Legacy*



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You're invited to a
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When: Friday at 10pm

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This battle was so heated we had to take the mics away.

This girl sang this guy a ballad, we uploaded the video on the PSN. They left together.

Her score was so high even our angry neighbors were impressed.

We downloaded "Kung Fu Fighting" off the SingStore, everyone sang along.

When everyone lost their voices, we let the videos play on a loop.

To see more party pics & videos, visit www.SingStarGame.com

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB	Lyrics Sexual Themes Use of Alcohol Use of Tobacco

ONLY ON
PLAYSTATION 3

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Reviews

Scores | Analysis | Buying Advice | Hardware

What's going on here? If you can identify the photo subjects and figure out how they're related, email the answer to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com for a chance to win random junk from Rob's desk. Label your email "Famous Bodies" to qualify!

RATINGS

★★★★★ **LEGENDARY**
A game so amazing, the entire PTOM staff recommends it. A must buy!

★★★★½ **SUPERB**
Not quite a timeless classic, but one of the finest of its breed.

★★★★ **GREAT!**
A finely crafted, thoroughly enjoyable experience. Worth your time and money.

★★★½ **SOLID**
A strong game. We noticed some flaws, but there's more to like than loathe.

★★★ **ENJOYABLE**
If the topic/license/style is your thing, there's enough to keep you entertained.

★★½ **MEDIOCRE**
An equal blend of sweet and sour. Discerning gamers can find better.

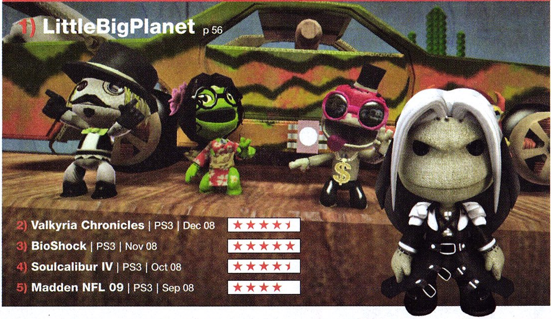
★★ **SCARRED**
A smattering of entertainment hidden amongst an abundance of flaws.

★½ **FRUSTRATING**
"Argh!" will be the self-created soundtrack of this game. No thank you.

★ **PAINFUL**
We played it so you don't have to. Now you owe us cookies.

½ **BROKEN**
Hey, it comes in a free plastic box! Wee!

Hot 5 List Top Picks from the Last Five Issues



1) **LittleBigPlanet** p 56

2) **Valkyria Chronicles** | PS3 | Dec 08 ★★★★½

3) **BioShock** | PS3 | Nov 08 ★★★★★

4) **Soulcalibur IV** | PS3 | Oct 08 ★★★★½

5) **Madden NFL 09** | PS3 | Sep 08 ★★★★

Meet the experts delivering your buying advice

This month, the PTOM team dabbles with omnipotence and creates Sackboys in their image.

ROB SMITH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Rob's Sackboy is simple. Red and white striped shirt. Black shorts. Black socks. Decked out as a Sheffield United soccer player, and with the team colloquially referred to by fans as the Red and White Wizards, with a nickname of the Blades, he might wield a wand or a sword, too! Then Mr. Smith would lovingly pack his Sackboy away as he departs for another year at Hogwarts.

NOW PLAYING: *FIFA 09, LittleBigPlanet, Resistance: Fall of Man*

TERESA DUN
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Teresa thinks Xianghua and Mitsurugi (from *Soulcalibur IV*) would make fantastic additions to *LBP!* The two could battle on a platform surrounded by poison, and the goal would be for them to slap, pull, and tug each other to their deaths. The only problem would be convincing the other guys on staff to play along. "We're sick of your trash talk, Teresa. Go sit in the corner!" Awww.

NOW PLAYING: *Soulcalibur IV* (you know it!), *Fallout 3, Naruto: UNS, Patapon*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

Steven Gerrard and Fernando Torres Sackboys are kind of no-brainers for Ken. He thinks they would be in the Liverpool away kit which is gray this year. That would integrate nicely with the muted earth tones of the *LBP* and play to the subtle shading of the game. He does need someone to start working on an Anfield stadium though. Sure, Ken, we'll get right on that! (Oh boy—*another* deadline we're going to miss.)

NOW PLAYING: *FIFA 09* (PSP and PS3), and real-life soccer, of course!

GARY STEINMAN
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Gary's grand *LBP* plan? Simple. Start with a standard Sackboy, toss on a jaunty newsboy cap and a pair of weathered, sepia-toned overalls, then name his creation Amsterdam. Easy enough, but here's where the real fun starts: Instead of the customary burlap, Amsterdam will be made out of hemp. Then Gary would smoke him. For, uh, medicinal purposes. Yeah, that's it.

NOW PLAYING: *Far Cry 2, Eternal Sonata, Legendary, LittleBigPlanet*

ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

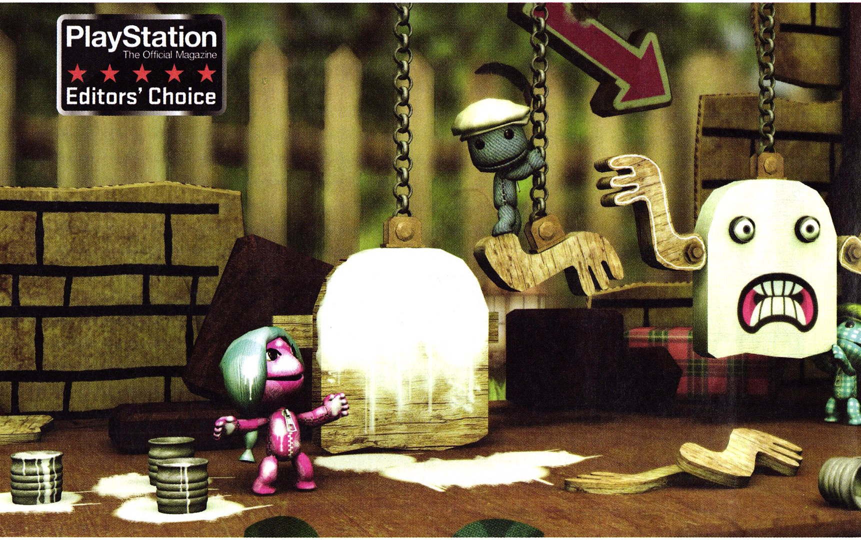
Roger's Sackboy would be a Bomb Squad Technician who's made entirely of marshmallow (body armor, too). His level would be filled with hundreds of switches and bombs, some connected, some not. Meanwhile, ninjas would throw grenades, which invariably causes a huge, fiery explosion resulting in the untimely melting of our fluffy friend. And then we eat. Mmm...

NOW PLAYING: *LittleBigPlanet, SingStar Vol. 2, PAIN: Amusement Park*

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Scott has a bit of a cruel sense of humor. He claims he's going to create a Waldo Sackboy (you know: tall guy, white shirt with red stripes, always getting lost...) then build the most confusingly elaborate level imaginable and trap him somewhere inside. It will be up to the player to find him. Then and only then can we truly know the answer to that eternal query: "Where's Waldo?" Where indeed, readers. Where indeed.

NOW PLAYING: *Mirror's Edge, Rock Band 2, Spider-man: Web of Shadows*



PS3 | R

LittleBigPlanet

You've got the whole world in *your* hands

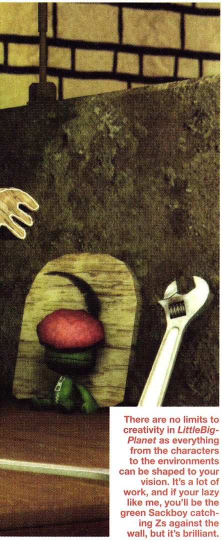
PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Media Molecule

Cuteness, in general, makes me want to puke. Nothing would make me happier than if Hello Kitty met Hello Bus; I hate Disneyland; sweet makes me sick. Which is why the amount of time I spent agonizing over my Sackboy's appearance in *LittleBigPlanet* is astounding. Mere *minutes* into the game and I'm ruminating the fashion merits of brown burlap and orange denim! Should I try to recreate an established look or boldly innovate a new vogue? And how *do* you accessorize a pirate ninja anyway? HOW HAVE I COME TO THIS SAD STATE?! I am left no choice but to officially designate myself one of "the first against the wall when the revolution comes."

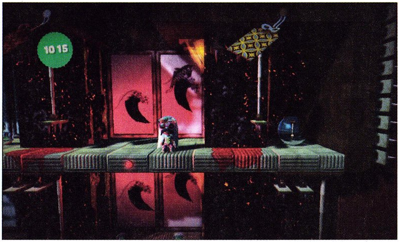
Well, if the revolution arrives, and if it *is* televised, it will most likely star Sackboy. With all due respect to Crash, Jak and Daxter, and Ratchet and Clank, Sony has finally found its iconic mascot to rival Mario and Sonic. Make no mistake; Sackboy possesses the star power capable of not only marketing a game, but humanizing a whole console brand and defining its personality.

It's interesting that while the classic icons of platform games past are associated with a particular look and persona (Mario with his mustache and overalls, Sonic with his red shoes and attitude), Sackboy's customizable cuteness is more akin to a metaphorical blank canvas. The representative image for the PS3 may well be a character whose look and personality is determined as much by the user as the developer.

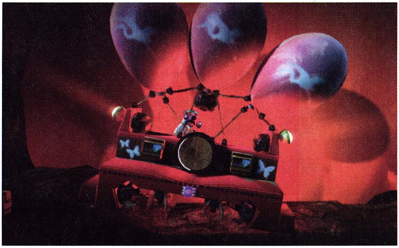
There is the inclination to peg *LBP* as a fairly derivative platformer with a level builder, but there is *something* to this burlap dynamo—something fresh, something new, something filled with potential. And what a refreshing change that is for an industry that too often defines



There are no limits to creativity in *LittleBigPlanet* as everything from the characters to the environments can be shaped to your vision. It's a lot of work, and if your lazy like me, you'll be the green Sackboy catching Zs against the wall, but it's brilliant.

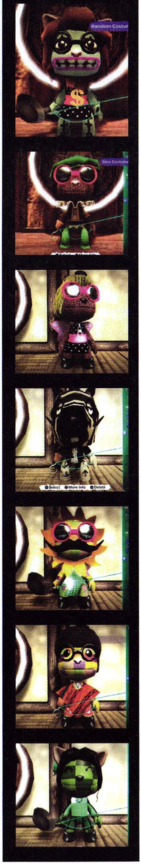


The levels are literally filled with item-filled spheres (but some are extremely challenging to locate). Find and collect them all to acquire new outfits, materials, and stickers.



It's not all about running and jumping. Sackboy has ample opportunity to pilot a number of rides and vehicles like this imaginative rendition of an airship.

Sack Dates: "Hey, didn't I see you on Match.com?"



innovation as a better version of a genre-leading competitor.

Couple Sackboy's disarming innocence and "adorable and charming©" (as fellow editor, Teresa Dun would say) nature with an ambitious, and perhaps groundbreaking, level of gamer interaction and socialization, and you too will begin to discover *LBP's* irresistible allure.

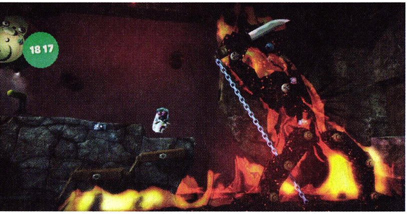
Play

Play. Create. Share. In a rare instance of a tagline perfectly defining a product, LittleBigPlanet's marketing mantra is a succinct, precise synopsis its essence. If I applied that same formula to most games I review, I'd put the preponderance of importance on the "play" element of the equation, but that's not the case with *LBP*. Play, in this instance, warrants no more than equal weight in that triumvirate and ample arguments could be made that it's the least important factor.

Make no mistake, *LBP* is a fine addition to the side-scrolling platformer fraternity, but the single-player story mode is more like a rolling demo reel of the "create" components than a supremely executed gaming experience unto itself. The eight worlds are comprised of three to four main levels and two to four mini-sidegame levels, totaling some 50 levels that can be sped through in a single-digit range of hours, or played (and replayed) more thoroughly in about 15 to 25 hours. If you want to earn 100-percent of the goodies on every level it's conceivable to squeeze out even more playtime, particularly since some of the objectives require you to bring in at least one friend to cooperatively manipulate buttons and levers to access the pay-off.

The visual style can best be described as a live action version of a stop motion animated show, and while that may sound oxymoronic, the important point is that *LBP* has a fresh look all its own. But while you're being wowed by the eye candy, you'll find frequent instances of déjà vu as you navigate the levels. ("Hey, wasn't that from *Super Mario*... Whoa, I think I just channeled *Sonic*...") The good news is that *LBP* manages to make most of these instances feel like tributes rather than rip-offs (one level *did* make me think someone should be writing out a royalty check to *Donkey Kong).* In what I'm hoping is a purposeful tip of the hat to genre clichés, there's even a mine cart level. But Media Molecule deserves serious accolades for creating just as many innovative game sequences.

While playing through the levels is a mostly enjoyable experience there are a few gameplay quibbles that prevent LBP from earning immediate induction into the Platforming Hall of Fame. The most fundamental issue is the control on what is not a strictly two-dimensional plane. Sackboy can move forwards and backwards on three "3D" planes or layers. The



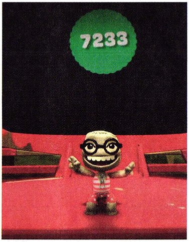
DLC Me

Thanks to the promise of DLC, there's virtually no limitation to Sackboy's outfits and accessories. Here's a brief list of what PTOM would like to see added to his closet:

STAR WARS:
Darth Vader outfit
Stormtrooper outfit
Leah's Slave Girl outfit
Lightsaber
Yoda ears

LORD OF THE RINGS:
The Ring of Power
Lots o' swords
Mithril vest
Elven cloaks
Furry Hobbit feet

Superhero outfits
Cheerleader outfits
PSP
Bullwhip
Licensed Sports uniforms
Throwable/kickable balls
Madonna's Cone Bra
Viking gear
Shogun helmet
Samurai battle armor
Ball gag
Ladders
Emerald Nuts
Musical instruments
iPhones and iPods
Toast



problem is that moving between the planes isn't seamless and entails two taps up on the Left Analog stick to move deeper into the scene and a tap down and a simultaneous press of X (action button) to move forward. It can often be difficult to tell which plane you're on during the heat of gameplay, which results in more untimely demises than necessary. Sackboy's physics are also just a little too slippery, landing and sliding off surfaces just enough to cause too many frustrating moments. Media Molecule has acknowledged this issue and intimated that it's something that can be addressed in future DLC.

But while *LBP* may not be devoid of play issues, it still ranks among the best platformers available on the PS3. If I had to judge the game based entirely on its one-player mode, it would likely score 4.5 stars—I enjoyed it that much, but story mode is only the beginning of the *LittleBigPlanet* experience...

Create

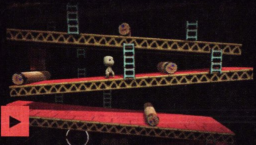
On the most basic level, *LBP* encourages the creative bent by customizing your Sackboy with outfits and accessories, and your home base "pod" with stickers. Call it fashion design if you must, but it's really about tapping into the childhood love of playing with dolls (okay, action figures for all you "men" out there). Through this seemingly innocuous act of expression though, we develop a personal bond with an otherwise soulless electronic entity. And stickers? Well, there's a closet interior decorator or graffiti artist lurking in all of us, I warrant.

But it's in the level creation capabilities of *LBP* that the genius and potential of the game shines through. What gamer hasn't dreamed about creating their own game? As a reviewer, I constantly scrutinize and pinpoint the good, bad, and indifferent in game design, but *LBP* provides an easily accessible set of tools to take my insights and formulate them into my own creation. You know what I discovered? It's not as easy as it looks!

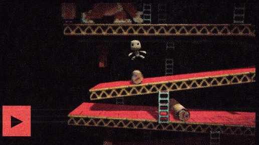
Nothing makes you realize the genius present in a great platforming game like having to sweat the details in your own creation. To a great extent, it's easy to spot and criticize failure in an endeavor, but it's another thing altogether to orchestrate success. An unsatisfactory level boss is easy to spot, but when you try to set the parameters for the exact spacing and distancing of platforms, to the operational mechanics of the boss, to the initiation points and range of sound effects and music, you begin to realize the acuity of mind necessary to create balance.

And the truth for me? I'm a lot better at playing games than building them. I'm either too impatient or lazy to dissect every nut, bolt, and nuance. But I love the fact that *LBP* gives the motivated talent out there a stage. I love the fact that I get to

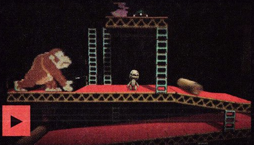
gamesradar.



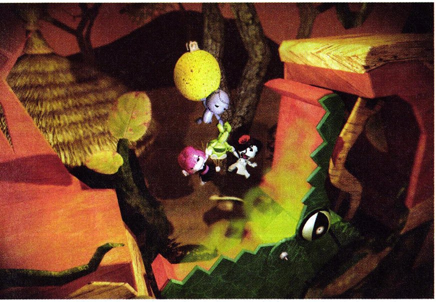
What did GamesRadar's Mikel Reparez create with his first go-through of the level building tools?

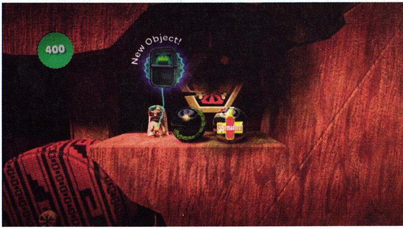


Sackboy Kong. Donkey Sackboy (wait, no, that sounds...anyway...)



To see more go to www.gamesradar.com/ps3/f/8-bit-levels-in-littlebigplanet/a-20081021125966205 3





play and enjoy your dreams. And *that's* the genius.

Share

Does not play well with others—that about sums me up. But I will grudgingly admit that *LBP* has the best integration of online interaction and socialization features I've yet seen in a game. The ability to publish levels and elicit player feedback is a natural offshoot of the game's creative components, and the fact that a significant portion of the Trophies is centered around your creations and sampling those of others is a great incentive to get out there and mingle. However, the fact that certain areas throughout the single-player game require two to four friends to complete is grating in my mind. I understand that it's the developers' way of pushing interaction with others, but requiring it in the Story mode seems heavy-handed. I especially resent the fact that it's impossible for me to attain a 100-percent rating on a number of the levels without venturing online and soliciting help. It makes me feel dirty—and not in the good way.

I got the point, Media Molecule, and Sackboy sold me on the goods. I'm okay with the fact that I'll never attain a Platinum Trophy if I don't learn to share. But keep your stinkin' multiplayer fascism out of my one-player game! Or at least provide an alternative puzzle solve that doesn't require buddies.

And in the end...

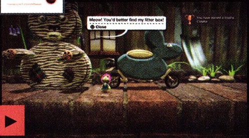
It's too early yet to declare a new era or direction in gaming, but *LittleBigPlanet* feels like the birth of a revolution; like through sharing our collective creativity we'll somehow become better, stronger, closer to each other. The Beatles tried to teach us the same thing really: "The love you take, Is equal to the love you make." The reality of what comes from *LBP's* user-created content may not live up to that hyperbole (it's easy to make a level, it's hard to make one worth more than ten seconds of playthrough), but it's a beautiful sentiment—one that we all *want* to believe in.

So as I sit down and begin creating my next Sack buddy (still feeling silly about the time and effort I'm expending), I think I'll relax some, believe a bit, let myself go. Pilot Starship *Cynic* (the one that's always half empty) towards *LBP,* embrace my inner child (who's been waiting for me), and step into a brave new world. And yeah, I'm going to find some way to make my Sackboy a Beatles fan.

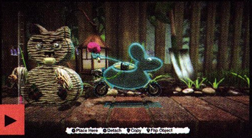
Roger Burchill

★★★★★

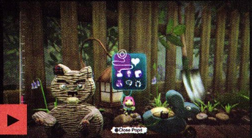
> “*LittleBigPlanet* feels like the birth of a revolution; like through sharing our collective creativity we'll somehow become better, stronger, closer...”



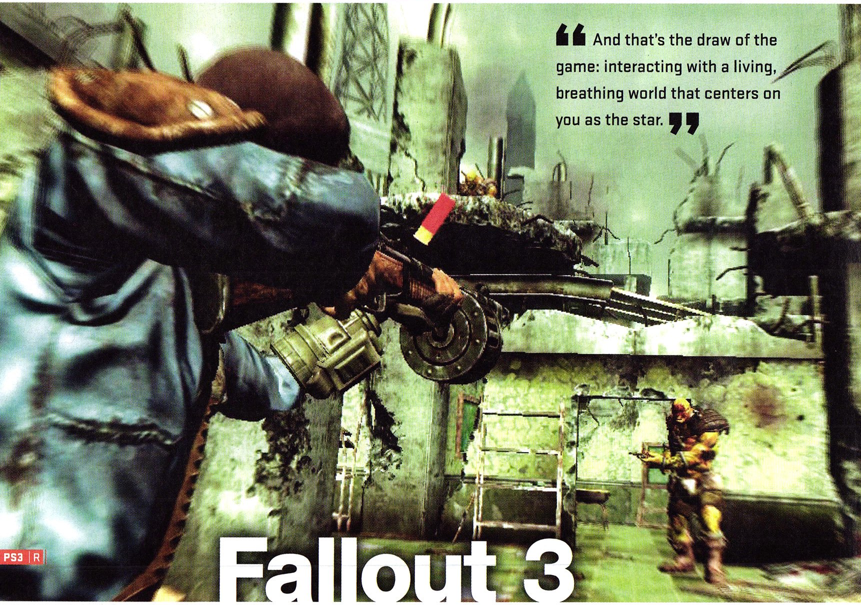
Qore host Veronica Belmont's first level design focused on her adoration of her cats!



A rocket-powered mouse isn't one of the goodies you find, but has to be specially crafted.



Jump on the back of the mouse and the rocket fires, sending it past stickers of Veronica's own cats.



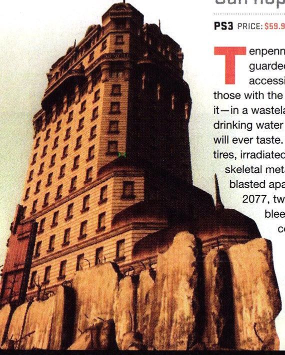
> And that's the draw of the game: interacting with a living, breathing world that centers on you as the star.

When your father (voiced by a brilliant Liam Neeson) disappears, you venture into the Wasteland to seek answers.

Fallout 3

Can hope...die?

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Bethesda Softworks DEVELOPER: Bethesda Softworks



All you have to do to earn a penthouse suite in Tenpenny Towers is kill your conscience very early in the game.

Tenpenny Towers. A well-guarded luxurious residence accessible to a chosen few—those with the bottle caps to afford it—in a wasteland where purified drinking water is an indulgence few will ever taste. Outside Vault 101, old tires, irradiated foodstuffs, and the skeletal metal remains of buildings blasted apart in the nuclear war of 2077, two hundred years ago, bleed into a landscape of colorless despair.

My character, a dark-haired, dark-eyed young lady named Tizzy, stumbles upon the tower by accident, while searching for her father. She watches curiously as a ghoul—a human who endured so much radiation that his skin has decayed into a mass of rotting flesh—speaks angrily into an intercom, demanding the doors of Tenpenny Towers swing open to allow him and his fellow ghouls entrance. The voice on the other side snootily replies that *his* type is not permitted inside, as per Mr. Tenpenny's orders. The ghoul mumbles that they'll be sorry—he already has a plan.

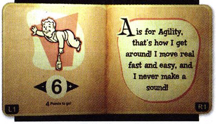
A minute later, I approach the ghoul. Now, I've nurtured Tizzy into a good character with a few vices… a saint-like kleptomaniac, if you will. So when the ghoul suggests that the best way I can help him is to eliminate, violently, the elitist, bigoted, but otherwise innocent residents of Tenpenny Towers, I steer him toward a more peaceful resolution: co-existence. He's skeptical, but I tell him to trust me and he does since I have the Black Widow Perk, which lets me use my feminine charms on male characters, even rotting ones.

At this point, I can eradicate the ghouls, aid them in their vengeful plan, pilfer enough goods to make Tenpenny's residents leave in an angry huff, or ditch the area altogether.

I appear to have options. But really, I don't. Because whatever

Personal Growth

EARN EXPERIENCE POINTS by completing quests, killing *anything*, picking locks, hacking computers, sweet-talking NPCs, and more. With each level you gain, you can assign points to various skills, like Small Guns, Sneak, and Medicine. You can also pick one Perk per level, like Animal Friend (wild animals won't attack you) or Child at Heart (offers unique dialogue choices when talking to children). The system isn't revolutionary, but the Perks allow you to create a character that caters to your play-style. Tizzy was an intelligent, agile, sneaky wielder of small guns, with a strong back (to carry 50 extra pounds of stolen equipment).



A is for Agility, that's how I get around! I move real fast and easy, and I never make a sound!

Much like in *Oblivion*, the menu in *Fallout 3* is a convoluted mess! Navigating it is like a mini-game all unto itself.

This gruesome, ferocious Yao Guai will come to your aid if put two points into the Animal Friend Perk. If you don't? Better watch your back when you go out at night.

An explosive arsenal

MY HOT-KEYED WEAPONS OF CHOICE: a combat shotgun, a scoped .44 magnum, a 10mm pistol, and a handful of frag grenades along with a Stimpak shortcut to quickly earn back hit points. Although there are dozens of other weapons you can loot, and a handful more that you can craft, these are my favorite firearms.

When I encounter an enemy, I have two choices. One, I can aim by pressing L1 and fire by pressing R1, manually ducking behind cover to reload when needed, like an unrefined but effective first-person shooter. Or two, I can activate the Vault-Tec Assisted Targeting System (V.A.T.S.) by pressing R2, which pauses the game to allow me to pick which body part I want to shoot. V.A.T.S. requires Action Points, which refill over time, so in most scenarios I had to use a combination of both systems. Combat is slower than in a standard FPS, quicker than a turn-based RPG, and easily graspable for even nominal RPG fans.

Three other quick notes about combat: weapons, limbs, and addictions. Ammo is scarce and weapons deteriorate, so always restock and repair when you're at a weapon vendor (or scavenge the parts to repair them yourself, if you have enough Repair skill). When repeatedly hit, your limbs eventually become crippled, affecting your ability to function (an injured arm makes it harder to aim, for example). Lastly, Chems can give you a battle boost, providing increased attack power or defense. But rely on them too much and you get addicted, which means you'll have to keep chugging the drug or deal with a major attribute penalty until you find a doctor.

I choose will have repercussions, ripples that spread throughout the Capital Wasteland. Merchant caravans will discuss my deeds, radio DJs will advise people to either embrace or fear me, and I'll know in my heart whether I made a wise decision. Maybe it's the first-person perspective, but I'm way too emotionally invested in this impressively detailed world to act rashly. There's only one correct course of action for *me*: peacefully persuade Tenpenny and his tenants to allow the ghouls to live in the tower alongside them…

And I manage to do it without a single death, earning Tizzy a large helping of karma, which increases the bounty on her head (bad folks in the wastelands don't like do-gooders) but also grants her an immense warm-fuzzy feeling of satisfaction.

Rugged badlands

That's only one of hundreds of scenarios scattered across the remains of Washington, D.C. But here's an underlying truth for all of them: This is a sad, broken world, and as many similarities as *Fallout 3* shares with *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion,* Bethesda's previous title, you should understand that the tone is much, much darker and more mature.

The bright spot is that once you emerge from the isolated underground vault you were raised in, you have an indelible impact on this grim world's future. As you traverse ramshackle towns, the crumbling remains of old landmarks, and flooded metro stations… As you hunt down escaped androids, hand precious purified water to beggars, and encourage useless old men to commit suicide… As you listen to the propaganda from the Enclave, the Church of Atom, and countless other organizations trying to find direction and hope in a screwed-up world… You influence the lives of everyone around you.

And that's the draw of the game: interacting with a living, breathing world that centers on *you* as the star.

Baby steps

To be honest, *Fallout 3*'s main storyline was too bleak for my personal tastes. (Those developers sure do love to toy with emotions…and not always in a good way! At times, it feels like they're deliberately encouraging you to care, only to present you with a no-win situation. *Boo!)* The sub-plots, too, sometimes feel like a mishmash of every possible science fiction cliché. And…I hated (yes, the powerful H-word, with a passion!) the scenario surrounding the game's ending, though many may find it poetically appropriate. (Depending on your earlier choices, you receive one of countless endings based on your life, but the pillars of the main plot don't change, no matter what you do. And some of those story arcs are…distressing.)

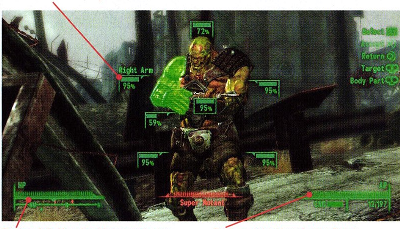
Fortunately, I created over a hundred save files, so I loaded one up. I had so much left to do! I hadn't finished researching a survival guide for an optimistic mechanic in Megaton hoping to make a difference. I hadn't responded to an S.O.S. call I stumbled upon via an emergency radio frequency… The list went on.

As for Tenpenny Towers, well, it's a bleak world. I thought I had found a peaceful resolution, but when I passed the tower 20 hours later, I discovered…well, I don't want to spoil it for you. But Tizzy's feeling very disappointed right now. There is still much work for her—no, for *everyone*—to do, before humanity can return to this wasteland.

Teresa Dun

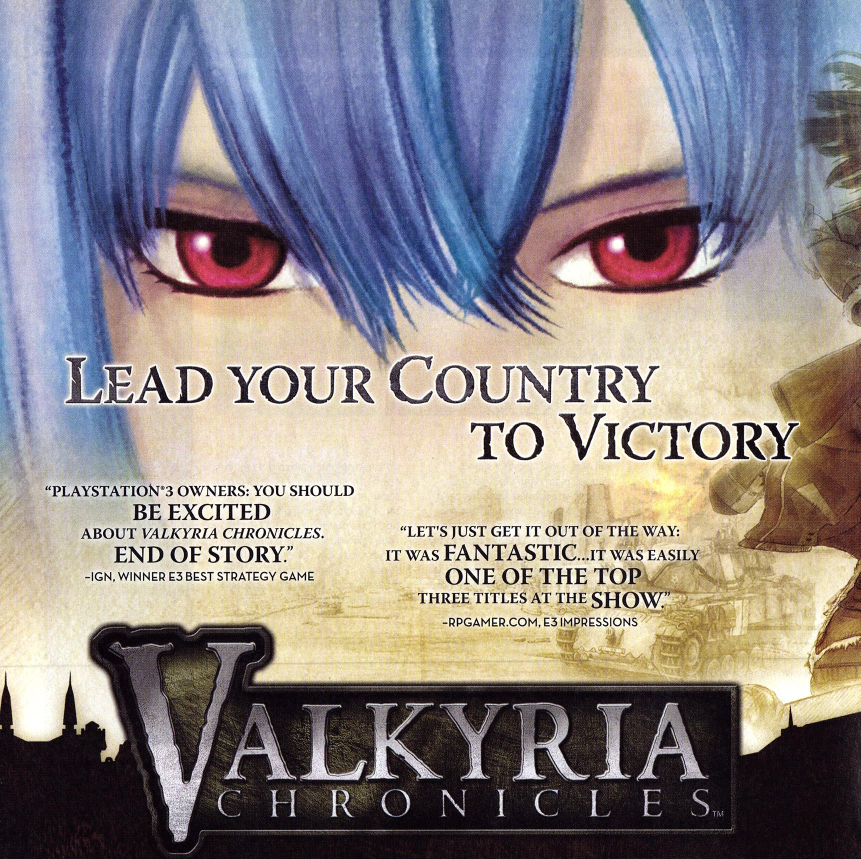
★★★★½

V.A.T.S. shows both your percentage chance of hitting each limb and the health of each limb, making it easy to pick a specific target. The red line at the Super Mutant's knees shows his overall health.



Bottom left: Your health bar and compass. A red line signifies an aggressive enemy. Looks sparse, but it works.

Bottom right: Your Action Point gauge, your weapon's condition, and your ammo supply.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WWE

SmackDown vs. Raw 2009

Ready for the main event

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: Yuke's

Mysterio and Batista will butt heads in Road to Wrestlemania. It's your job to work as a cohesive team.

It's been a year since the *WWE* wrasslin' franchise entered the PS3 ring, affirmed its dominance, and figuratively raised the championship belt aloft above its head. *SmackDown vs. Raw 2009* smashes that same belt into the face of any-and-all challengers as it power-bombs expectations—through a flaming table.

Gameplay remains largely unchanged from *'08;* the right thumbstick handles all weak grapples, while holding R1 (your Strong modifier) and flicking the right stick initiates more powerful attacks like Press Slams. One of this year's best additions is the new Guard move, enabling you to protect yourself from a downed position when rising from the mat. It was starting to feel pretty cheap getting pummeled repeatedly in previous years. I never realized how defenseless I was until the addition of this new move, and its inclusion should balance online matches significantly better.

Ditching last year's lackluster WWE 24/7 season mode, THQ has split its season mode in two. Road to Wrestlemania enables you to progress through six grappler-specific storylines. Each linear story is fairly short at three hours, but includes fascinating scenarios like travelling to the Middle East for a tribute show as John Cena or controlling a zombie with Undertaker's "magical" powers. Plus, the production values replicate the *Raw* and *SmackDown* TV shows almost perfectly. Pyrotechnics introduce each show, camera angles tilt wildly, and the announcers thank you for tuning in.

Alternately, the extremely robust—and completely stat-driven—Career mode tracks just about everything your wrestlers (created or existing) could ever do. While Career lacks cutscenes, it's a no-frills path to whichever championship you desire, including about 100 in-game medals to collect for bragging rights.

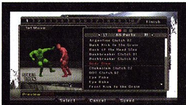
Sadly, age-old issues like clipping and spotty collision detection still exist, the enemy AI seems a bit dumber than usual, and the unlockable characters leave much to be desired.

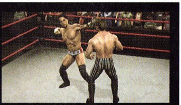
Still, other than fine-tuning the new play modes, I have no idea how the game could improve. *WWE '09* provides enough content and depth to last the armchair wrestler for years and is one of the most accessible yet deepest sports games I've ever played.

Shane Patterson

★★★★½

PS3 | R

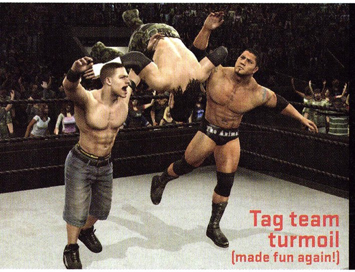




Jump in the toy box

This year's Create modes are truly exceptional. Devising my own Frankenstein-like superfreak is a blast in the always-robust Create-A-Wrestler, as is perfecting his/her strut down the aisle with Create-An-Entrance. A liberating Create-A-Finisher mode completes my god-like powers, letting me create moves I never dreamed I'd see in *SmackDown's* deliberately paced gameplay.

The coolest new feature is probably the MyWWE Highlight Reel editor, which enables you to stitch together your own replays complete with multiple camera angles, filters, text, music, and more. I spent an hour coming up with a ridiculous, yet hilarious, 30-second clip. I personally can't wait to see what kinds of hilarious Highlight Reels players will upload. Get editing!

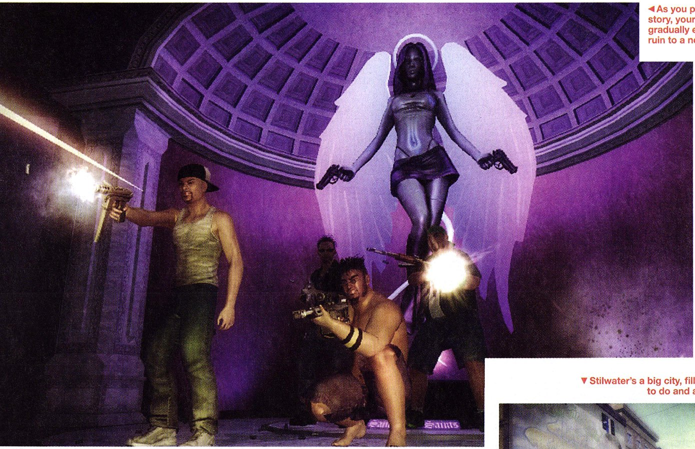


Tag team turmoil (made fun again!)

THQ has spent a lot of time revamping the archaic Tag Team mode. Teammates now share a single momentum meter, so teams fight as a cohesive unit. Add to that a host of double team moves, including finishers, and this mode is sure to reignite your interest.

The Undertaker is pumped to have finally overcome his excessive underarm hair growth issues. "Please," says Jeff Hardy, "Look closely. Smooth as a baby's..."

MASOCHIST



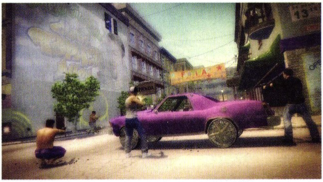
◀ As you progress through *SR2's* story, your gang's hideout will gradually evolve from a crumbling ruin to a neon-drenched nightclub.

You are not alone

Besides story-based co-op for two players, *Saints Row 2* features a free-form multiplayer mode called "Strong Arm" for up to eight players. Here, two rival gangs battle their way through random objectives, ranging from escorting prostitutes to running each other over for insurance money. It's fast, chaotic, and a lot more fun than it morally should be! But then, who wants to be a saint on Saints Row?

***Saints Row 2* features a stellar voice cast,** including Neil Patrick Harris, *Star Trek's* Michael Dorn, and *Lost's* Daniel Dae Kim.

▼ Stilwater's a big city, filled with interesting things to do and annoying people to shoot.



Saints Row 2

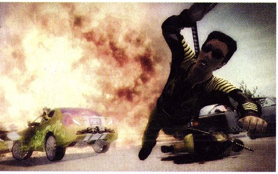
Stilwater runs deeper than you think

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: Volition

PS3 | R

It's impossible to look at *Saints Row 2* without comparing it, on some level, to *Grand Theft Auto IV.* But while *GTA IV* took crime game storytelling in a mature new direction, *Saints Row 2* is mature in rating only.

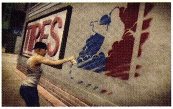
In fact, *SR2* seems tailor made for people who disliked *GTA IV's* realism. The cars are zippy and handle like toys, character development is shoved aside in favor of explosions, the cops are a joke, and ridiculous tasks litter the streets like leftover condoms at scenic teenage hangouts. Did you miss having a mansion in *GTA IV?* Now you can have *eleven* swanky abodes. Did you get sick of dying all the time? Now your guy's a nigh-invincible meat tank with regenerating health, and your enemies are suicidal idiots who double as human shields. Want planes and skydiving? Customizable high-performance cars? The ability to weaponize objects in the environment? Traffic surfing? *Zombie-killing? SR2* has them all, and without any annoying cousins pestering you to go bowling.



Every car in Stilwater is a massive explosion waiting to happen.

At the heart of the craziness is a simple plot that sees your outrageously customizable character going to war with three rival gangs—which you can tackle in any order—to reclaim the city of Stilwater (which has changed a lot since the first *Row)* for your gang, the Saints. It's the same structure as the first *Row,* right down to the dozens of side activities—which now include barnstorming and spraying sewage from a truck—that you need to pursue in order to build up enough "Respect" to take on missions.

▶ Claiming "tag spots" in multiplayer can grant special boosts to your abilities.



With all its silliness, *SR2* can't really be taken seriously—but it's never quite clear whether it's meant to be. On its face, it's a parody of *GTA's* sly satire, filled with hit-or-miss goofiness and presenting gang life as imagined by suburban 12-year-olds: fun, colorful, and consequence-free. But that doesn't always jibe with the story's darker moments, or with the alarming cruelty of some of its murders.

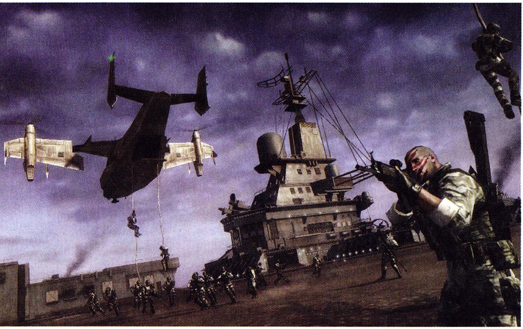
Saints Row 2 isn't anywhere near as sophisticated as *GTA IV,* but it's hard not to like it; there's just too much game here, and it's clear the developers tried hard to include everything *GTA* fans might have wanted from *IV,* but didn't get. *SR2* is loud, destructive, and dumb as hell, but that's what makes it so much fun.

Mikel Reparaz

★★★★

MANIAC

Funny, I expected the "end of all war" to look a bit more...tranquil.



China was somehow left out of *EndWar's* country line up even though Ubisoft Shanghai developed the game.

Playing an RTS from a ground-level perspective is jarring at first. But commanding troops via heated shouts on the optional headset is intuitive and empowering.

Tom Clancy's

EndWar

Talking to TVs isn't just for crazy people anymore

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 (game only); $89.99 (with headset) ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Shanghai

PS3 | R

Ironic, isn't it, how steps taken to reduce the threat of war only seem to escalate it? When an anti-ballistic missile system, the Space-Land-Air Missile Shield (SLAMS) technology, was successfully tested in 2014, all thought the earth had reached the end of the nuclear threat...indeed, the end of all war. But inevitable complications mean that by 2020, the world's three superpowers—the U.S., the European Federation, and Russia—are battling for global supremacy and control of various uplink stations that grant control of SLAMS.

That this WWIII real-time strategy title was built specifically for consoles is immediately apparent in the visuals. There's no Fog of War or birds' eye view of the battlefield. Instead, *EndWar* connects you directly to the combat by displaying action from your units' perspectives. This dynamic relies on you identifying enemies in your troops' line of sight as you jump from platoon to platoon instead of managing commands on a mini-map. Innovative, sure, but it's also frustrating. This system is perfect for ordering your gunships to attack a group of nearby tanks, for example, but it's not so great when you're squinting at the horizon trying to find the next uplink—or worse, trying to figure out what enemy types are kicking the crap out of you. The cheap hits quickly make you long for a top-down view.

At your disposal through these skirmishes are seven simple unit types: infantry, tanks, helicopters, transports, etc., each with a corresponding unit type they're strong or weak against—like a complicated game of "Rock, Paper, Scissors." Furthermore, each unit can earn upgrades (like improved weapons) for surviving battles, so it pays to keep your battalions alive. That approach, coupled with the fact that only infantry may capture uplinks, prevents simply gathering a massive army and steamrolling opponents. Each squad becomes a unique entity with a specific role to play.

You can use your controller to issue every command, but the real draw is using your headset for vocal order-shouting. Voice recognition is spot-on and it really does help to manage battles more efficiently than with the controller alone. The system is based on Who, What, and Where, so you'll mutter a lot of "Unit Four attack hostile B" and "Unit One secure uplink!"

I spent a lot of time watching battles on my Command Vehicle's black-and-white SitRep screen, because that Spartan-as-a-Risk-board overhead view was often the only practical way to manage troops. *EndWar*'s battles did elicit more fun than frustration; shouting madly at your units, deploying everything you have to hold an uplink for just a few more seconds is a totally unique console gaming experience. You'll have to explain to neighbors that you're not crazy; you're just trying to win a war.

Justin McElroy

★★★½

War That Never Ends

Online, you can participate in a perpetual *EndWar* in real-time. Choose a nation to represent, and then unleash your personal troops in various battlefields (chosen from a larger map menu, and where multiple versions of the each battlefield can exist simultaneously). At the end of each day, the victories and losses will be calculated, and each battlefield will be "won" by the U.S., the European Federation, or Russia. It's like a massively multiplayer online RTS!

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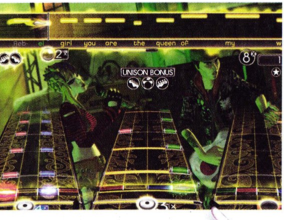
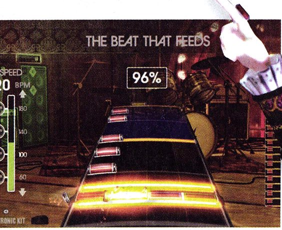
Battle of Rock Band 2

The Second Coming of Rock-n-Roll

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 (game only); $189.99 (disc, mic, guitar, drums) ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: MTV Games DEVELOPER: Harmonix





Would-be drummers rejoice! The judgment-free Drum Trainer mode is here to walk you through all the basic beats and fills you'll ever need.

Character customization hasn't received much of an upgrade this year, but it's still easy to create a diverse stable of your very own rockers.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is an encore. The curtain has just barely fallen, but we, the rabid fans, stand our ground, screaming for more. So after tuning their instruments and altering their wardrobes, the band quickly and triumphantly retakes the stage to belt out a few more hits. Sure, it's not a whole new show, but considering how much we enjoyed the first half, those few off-stage adjustments were more than enough to make us love the finale.

As with any encore, the biggest draw is the new music. *Rock Band 2's* disc alone contains 84 master tracks of some of the finest rock-n-roll ever crafted. Bob Dylan, Elvis Costello, AC/DC: bands you can be *proud* to turn up to annoy your neighbors. Add to that the 20 downloadable songs that come free to anyone with an Internet connection and a copy of the game, 55 songs from the original game (which you can easily transfer for a one-time five dollar fee), and all of the automatically compatible DLC you've compiled and you've got a set list that's staggering in both size and diversity. While the gameplay hasn't changed a bit since last year, this new batch of tracks offers a greater challenge for those who want it, and contains some of the most entertaining note charts we've played to date.

New music's not the only welcome addition, though. The focal Band World Tour mode, while almost completely unaltered in structure, is now fully cooperative both online and off. Of course, you can always just earn stars, fans, and cash by yourself—even setting up substitute characters so that you're always looking at the same band—but either way, you're no longer tied to a single instrument or character since all of your playing contributes to the same overall progression.

Also new to this year's rock fest are the ability to hire staff members and the "opportunity gigs" (such as video shoots and sponsorships) that come with them; Battle of the Bands mode, which is a series of daily and weekly score challenges ranging from genre-specific set lists to longest note streak competitions; and Band Challenges, which are somewhat single-player oriented song lists created dynamically based on the content you own. Oh, and let's not forget about the self-explanatory No Fail mode, Unlock All Songs option, and ability to create set lists in Quickplay, all of which make the game more party-friendly than ever.

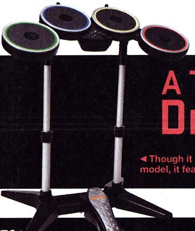
Other than that, unfortunately, the game is largely the same as the original. Some parts, such as the majority of the venues, are literally identical. But the quality of the original, unrivaled local multiplayer experience, and unprecedented post-release support still make this a must-have for anyone who enjoyed (or didn't play) the first game. You'd best get ready to rock.

Scott Butterworth

★★★★½

If you're doing particularly well during any given song, the crowd will actually start to sing along. It's a subtle detail, but it's guaranteed to make you feel like a rock star every time.

A Tale of Two Drumkits



◄ Though it looks nearly identical to last year's model, it features several improvements.

Customize your Cymbals

◄ Mad Catz's cymbals add an increased level of realism.

Thanks to its quiet, velocity-sensitive pads (which offer excellent rebound), a wireless connection, and a metal-reinforced foot pedal, *Rock Band's* drumkit allows for a truly enjoyable playing experience. Plus, by adding the sturdy and easily attachable Mad Catz cymbals to the kit ($19.99 for one, $29.99 for two, or $39.99 for the triple set), you not only give your set a far more authentic feel but actually exceed the number of inputs on the *Rock Rev* kit (its only claim to fame). And since the cymbals are only optional, they won't make your life more difficult, and the game will recognize them and produce an actual cymbal sound when you hit 'em.

the Bands

Rock Revolution

Rebeling against fun

PS3 PRICE: $49.99 (game only); $129.99 (with drum kit) ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Konami DEVELOPER: Zoe Mode

Rock Revolution **doesn't come with a guitar,** but the one currently resting in the corner of your living room—regardless of which of the two real rock behemoths it's designed for—will, in all likelihood, work just fine.

You've got to feel just a tad sorry for Konami. Through games like *DrumMania* and *Guitar Freaks,* it practically invented the rhythm-music genre only to be surpassed in both sales and popularity by its competitors. And now, as the coffers of those competitors continue to swell, Konami is diving into the fray with *Rock Revolution,* a game that falls so drastically short of what's now expected from a music game that the phrase "a day late and a buck short" simply fails to be adequate.

For starters, the paltry 40 song catalogue consists entirely of covers—which range from bland-but-passable to laughably awful—with many tracks that have previously appeared in one or more of those other music games (though even the never-before-seen songs like Whitesnake's "Still of the Night" and Avril Lavigne's "Sk8er Boi" fail to excite since they're mostly outdated hair metal and stale Top 40 hits from the past decade).

Sadly, the gameplay follows suit and dives headfirst into mediocrity. *Rock Revolution* boldly defies the tyranny of rational decision-making by choosing to omit vocals, leaving only pale imitations of the drum and guitar mechanics found in *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero*. The formula is simple enough, but *Rock Revolution* still doesn't manage to get it quite right.

The inexplicably small, vertically scrolling notes drop awkwardly and provide very little time to react, and while the actual note patterns are decent, they occasionally don't quite fit the music. In fact, Hard is often easier than Medium because it allows you to play what you hear and thus feels more intuitive. Really the only positive aspect of the gameplay is the combo system, which merely subtracts one increment from your combo multiplier when you miss a note rather than resetting it entirely.

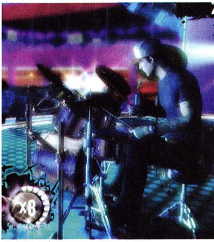
This sad parade then marches straight into the game's Career mode, which cannot be played with a friend (or on bass) and only requires you to play 45 songs. Well, you can also play *parts* of songs in the form of special challenges such as "memorize this section and play it back without seeing the notes." Why not just kick fun in the face and take its lunch money? Basically, the career mode is so linear that the experience it yields is lifeless. No rock-and-roll fantasy fulfillment here, folks.

Though you can't undertake a career with a friend, you can engage in some cooperative or competitive Quickplay. Thankfully, all tracks are unlocked from the moment you pop in the disc, but multiplayer is not without its headaches. The person who chooses the higher difficulty will inevitably win a competition; individual players cannot fail in co-op, only the band itself; and you cannot switch difficulty levels between songs without quitting. You can do all this online as well, but why bother?

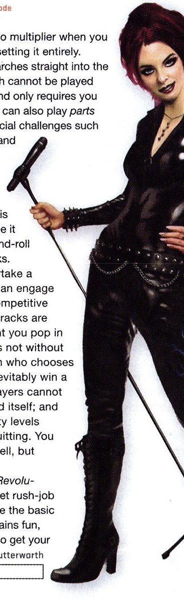
Everything about *Rock Revolution* smacks of a low budget rush-job (except the price) and while the basic note-hitting mechanic remains fun, there are far better places to get your music fix.

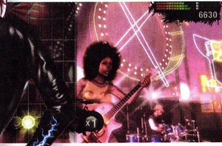
Scott Butterworth

★★

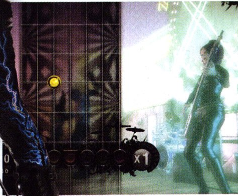


That blue glow around the notes means your "Power Meter" is charged, which, when activated, boosts your "Atmosphere Meter," which…wait, what?

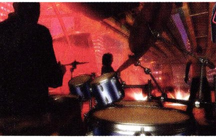


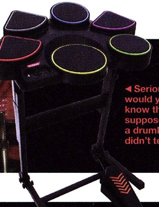


Sure hope you like the character design because this game contains absolutely no customization whatsoever!



In a particularly hilarious oversight (I guess?), the names of the bands featured in the game don't actually appear, um, *anywhere in the game!*

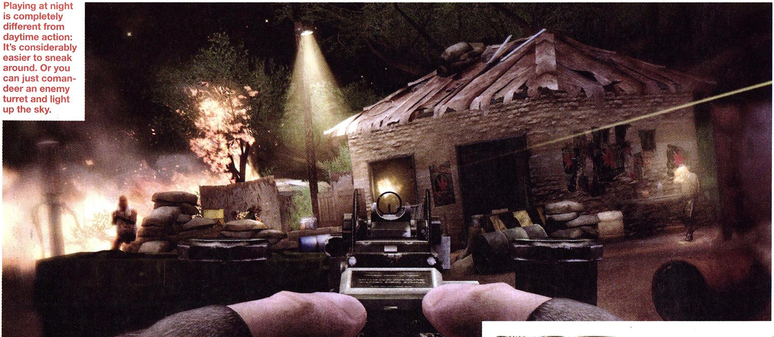




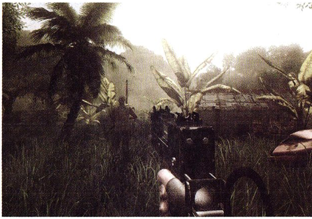
◂ Seriously, would you know this is supposed to be a drumkit if we didn't tell you?

Truly, *Rock Revolution's* drumkit is the harbinger of suck. Just one look and you know you're in for a less than stellar experience. The pads are too small, too numerous, and too awkwardly spaced, and though the game encourages you to play cross-handed (as a real drummer would), the lack of any real height difference among the pads makes this approach clumsy at best. Plus, the kit is wired and quite loud, emitting big, hollow thuds (and numerous accidental clacks, thanks to the bulky plastic shell).

Given that both drumkits are compatible with either game, the choice is clear.



Playing at night is completely different from daytime action: It's considerably easier to sneak around. Or you can just comandeer an enemy turret and light up the sky.



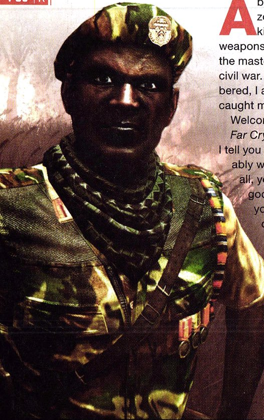
Good idea: a lethal headshot. Better idea: a one-hit kill with a silenced pistol—less fuss from the other guards roaming around.

Far Cry 2

Grand theft jungle

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal

PS3 | R



Abandoned in an African hot zone. My sole objective: to kill the Jackal, an amoral weapons merchant who's arguably the mastermind behind this not-so-civil war. I am alone, I am outnumbered, I am outgunned. And I just caught malaria.

Welcome to the jungle.

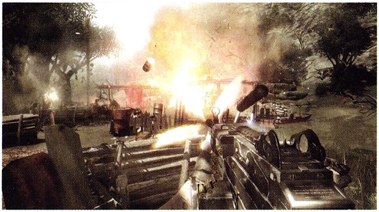
Far Cry 2 is a beautiful game. I tell you this because you probably won't realize it at first. After all, you're not a tourist in this godforsaken country. Instead, you're dodging bullets and ducking for cover in 50 square kilometers of belligerent jungle.

So here's my advice: If you can manage it, take a moment to look around. Look up at the clouds in the sky. Notice the way the sun peeks above the cliffs in the distance, or how the moon dominates the sky at night. Crawl through the dense underbrush and marvel at how the blades of grass stroke your face.

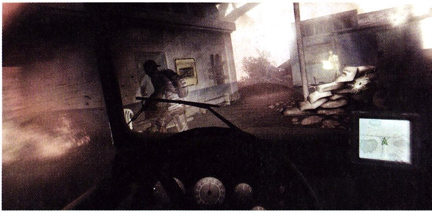
Too twee? Then focus instead on the grungier details. Start with your arm, dotted with bug bites. Move your eyes forward to peek at your weapon, and marvel at the details in each and every assault rifle, machine gun, pistol, mortar, rocket launcher, whatever. Now notice how the longer you hold on to a weapon, the more it degrades. The sheen will fade, it will rust, and the barrel will be caked in dust. In fact, the whole world you've just been dropped into seems afflicted with elegant, persistent decay. Everything—every vehicle, hovel, bridge, safehouse, boat, guard post—in this busted up tangle seems afflicted with atrophy, past its prime, and ready to fall apart.

And that includes the game itself—at first. Don't get me wrong: *Far Cry 2* is uniformly excellent, even in the opening hours when it struggles to find its comfort zone. As a shooter, it always succeeds, with tight control, thrilling gunfights, subdued stealth missions, and over-the-top explosions. And the fire… oh, the fire. Feeling overwhelmed and underpowered? Try tossing a grenade or blowing up a vehicle to set the jungle ablaze, smoking out your enemies. Just be careful: The weather changes every day in this hellhole, so if it's too moist your pyrotechnics might not take hold, but if it's too dry you might get burned alive in your own firestorm.

But back to that broke-down feeling. For the first quarter of the game, you're likely to wonder what all the fuss is about. The open-world structure means you'll spend far too much time commuting around the enormous map, simply trying to survive the arduous journey from one mission to the next. Sure, vehicles liberally sprinkled throughout the land help. And a bus system



Weapons range from a rusty machete to this honking big machine gun. Each one can be upgraded, and you can store backup weapons at any of your safehouses.



The map is no better or worse than in other open-world games. Which is to say, not very good. You will get shot a lot while trying to find your bearings.

allows for quick travel to the corners of the map. But events constantly conspire to trash your ride and set you back on foot. Every guard station is teeming with militia ready to run you down. Even deep in the uncharted areas of the jungle, you're likely to run into some crazed lunatic ready to halt your momentum and destroy your vehicle. Granted, it might be realistic, but when reality replaces fun, the game becomes work.

Heart of darkness

Then, at eight hours and 27 minutes into my playtime, my closest buddy died. In *Far Cry 2,* you will make friends—associations, really—and you have the option of listening to their advice and pursuing alternate goals during the course of your missions. In one such situation, I didn't quite make it back to my buddy in time, and thanks to my own general incompetence, she died. Or, to be precise, I held her in my arms and administered a lethal, merciful dose of meds, easing her passing. (I also got a Trophy for being so thoughtful. How nice.) Suddenly, something was at stake for me. I lost someone that I began to care about. And I now had a reason to value life—my own, my future buddies, the underground resistance. I was finally playing for real.

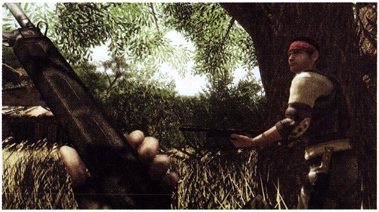
A couple of hours later I faced a true moral conundrum: save my fellow mercenaries (some of whom had hauled my sorry ass out of the line of fire several times), or save the civilian dissenters (not just a righteous choice, but a practical one—the Underground supplies me with my malaria pills, essential to staying alive). I made my choice; I journeyed deep into my heart of darkness, and from that moment forward, the game had me fully, completely immersed.

Maybe it was a coincidence. Around that same time, I finally crawled my way to the top of this game's deceptively steep and exhaustingly long learning curve. I figured out quicker ways to get around. I unlocked better weapons. I became adept at sneaking into encampments under the cover of night. I pulled off my first flawless assassination without alerting a single guard. I blew up a convoy from a distance. I successfully Rambo'd my way through a reckless daytime raid. I became the highly skilled mercenary I was always meant to be.

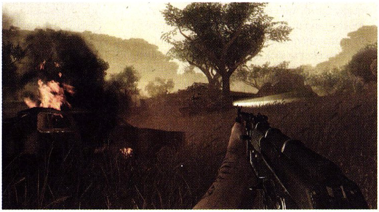
But I'd like to think it was something else. I lost a friend, and I finally had my own personal reason to soldier on. And that might be this game's most remarkable achievement: Despite all the killing, all the corruption, all the decay, *Far Cry 2* is the rare shooter that will actually get you to care.

Gary Steinman

★★★★½



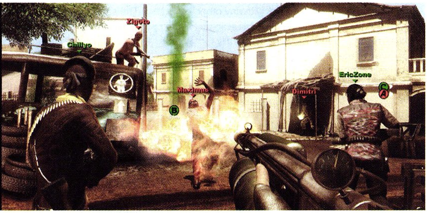
Look out for your buddies and they'll look out for you in return. Help them with missions and watch their backs—they'll repay the favor by saving your butt.

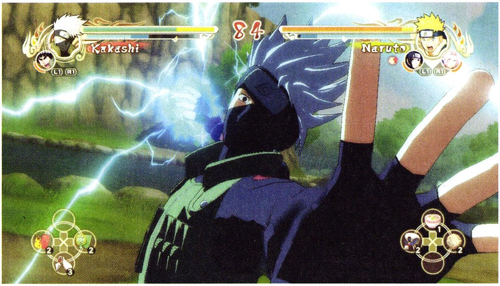


Fire is your friend, except when it's not. That small flame can quickly envelop your enemies, but it might also draw even more troops to the fray.

Mercenary Playground

Rather than just tacking on a set of extra maps, the *Far Cry 2* dev team approached the multiplayer mode as if it were its own game. The result: a very solid if somewhat standard online shooter. Bottom line: It's a great extra, but don't expect it to replace your current fave multiplayer FPS.





Oh Kakashi, you've won the hearts of so many *Naruto* fans... So won't you please show us your face now?

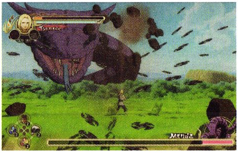
Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm

What!? Where's my Sexy Jutsu and Harem Technique!?

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai DEVELOPER: CyberConnect2

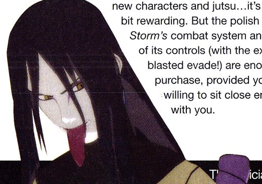
PS3 | R

An erotic novel, a luscious unibrow, and a floppy-eared canine? The ninja in *Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm* are a quirky bunch (with equally peculiar trademark moves), and that's good news for us because their idiosyncrasies equal *our* entertainment. Underneath the slick, cel-shaded graphics (deliciously pretty!) and the riotously comedic animations (Rock Lee's expression during his Leaf Burning Sky ultimate jutsu is a must-see) lies a 3D fighting title that blends button-mashing glee with precise timing—a combo that has me momentarily shelving my beloved *Soulcalibur IV* to indulge in jutsu-flavored mayhem.



Epic battles form a large part of Ultimate Mission Mode. Towards the end of these fights, you participate in reflex-based interactive mini-games.

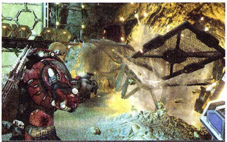
And mayhem it undoubtedly is, with an arsenal of moves vast enough to reel heads. All your melee, ranged, and dash attacks can be linked together in combos and are supplemented by powerful chakra-infused versions. With the additional block, evade, and grab abilities, *Ultimate Ninja Storm* is on par with any other fighting game on the market—but toss in an Ultimate Jutsu super-move (procedurally rendered to make your jaw drop), a pair of summonable support characters, four combat-friendly items, a Storm Gauge (when filled, it turns you into a frenzied beast, metaphorically), and an Awakening mode (which majorly alters your characters' abilities), and you can understand why combat can be dizzyingly difficult to master. As if that weren't enough, the battle arenas are massive and multi-faceted (you can even wall-climb in some of them). Luckily, the camera follows both combatants elegantly, so perfecting your timing is just a matter of practice—or, be a slacker and button-mash. I won't tell.



The sad lack of any online capability is somewhat remedied by the robust Ultimate Mission Mode. Breezing through the first 130 or so episodes of the *Naruto* anime, scouring through a sandbox Konoha village for treasures, earning new characters and jutsu…it's a bit tedious, a bit rewarding. But the polish of *Ultimate Ninja Storm's* combat system and the tightness of its controls (with the exception of that blasted evade!) are enough to warrant a purchase, provided you have a friend willing to sit close enough to brawl with you.

Teresa Dun

★★★★



East versus West. Genetic engineering versus terrain deformation technology. Civil strife. That pretty much sums up the plot of the game.

Fracture

Literally (but not figuratively) ground-breaking and side-splitting

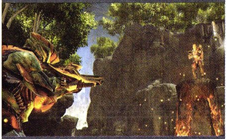
PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: LucasArts DEVELOPER: Day 1 Studios

Mission objective: get to other side of a thick, tall cement wall. Obstacles: no ladder, no doors, and no way around. What the hell do you do now? Two possible solutions: use your terrain manipulating Entrencher to raise the ground up, so you can hop right over the wall, or use it to lower the ground down, so you can discover a hidden tunnel designed for you to crawl through.

The puzzles become a little more complicated as *Fracture* goes on, but that pretty much sums up the highlight of this otherwise generic third-person shooter. Instantaneously building cover for yourself or plunging an enemy into a ceiling by raising the dirt he's standing on are a hoot—and the terrain deformation plays a key role throughout the game—but only if you enjoy a large dose of landscaping with your shooters. Because, beneath the terrain deformation mechanic, *Fracture* is just your humdrum, run-of-the-mill, science fiction shooter—and that includes the online multiplayer (which supports up to 12).

Teresa Dun

★★★



The terrain manipulation actually looks pretty convincing. Then again, I'm no seismologist.

To keep *Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm* at a Teen rating, the developers had to remove the fan-favorite Sexy Jutsu, though they originally planned to include it!

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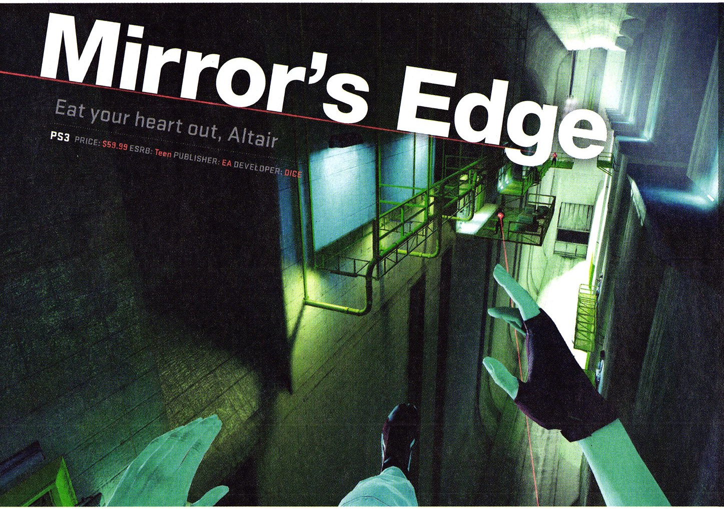
Mirror's Edge

Eat your heart out, Altair

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: DICE



Running with Mirror's

Parkour's popularity has grown exponentially in the past several years, even inspiring gripping scenes in films like *Casino Royale* and *District B13*. Now, like no game before it, *Mirror's Edge* gives you a chance to experience that action for yourself. But the core running mechanic is more than just refreshingly original; it's a lot of fun.

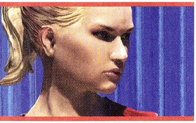
PS3 | R

Thanks to the first-person perspective and clean heads-up display, nothing separates you from the sensation of leaping between buildings...or being punched in the face.

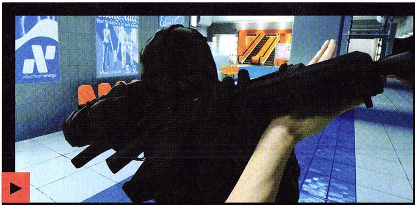
Bullets scream past my head. Hundreds of feet separate me and solid ground. Yet I continue to jump, dive, and swing my way through an urban obstacle course of steel pipes and chain-link fences, messenger bag in tow. Through the eyes of an underground courier named Faith, I bear witness to the last honest means of communication in a world where security means control and information is a dangerous commodity. And while the view is lovely, it's not exactly what you expect.

The first-person perspective, for example, defies expectation by functioning beautifully—contrary to the popular concern that the gameplay in *Mirror's Edge* simply wouldn't be compatible with this point of view. The controls not only become intuitive fairly quickly but actually create a delightfully unique gameplay experience. In fact, it would be difficult for me to overstate the pure joy the game's underlying mechanics invoke. Staring at your feet as you soar between rooftops, flipping forwards with the camera as you roll out of a heavy fall, seeing your hand extend in front of you to catch a ledge after a three-story drop—free-running in first-person is a powerfully fun sensation.

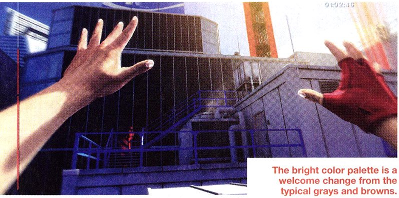
The action isn't always totally satisfying, though. What really makes the game fun is the sheer exhilaration you experience when stringing together a fluid chain of spectacular moves and building enough momentum to hit top speed. Problem is, when you're being pursued by a gang of gun-waving zealots and don't know exactly where you're going, you don't always have time to uncover that ideal route that will let you feel like a super-slick urban ninja. Far more often, you'll take an obvious, clumsy path because you don't want to die, and because there aren't any concrete rewards for taking a more inventive route or consequences for sticking with the obvious one. While the game never



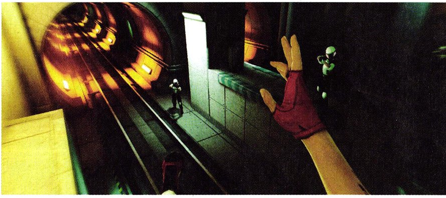
The game's narrative revolves around a group of seven key characters, including Celeste (above), a fellow runner who trains you in the opening tutorial.



Mirror's Edge is only as violent as you want it to be. In fact, you'll very rarely find yourself forced to attack enemies directly.



The bright color palette is a welcome change from the typical grays and browns.



In tough situations, you can utilize a slow-motion, bullet time effect (cleverly renamed "Reaction Time") which gradually builds as you run.

actually stops being fun, it can feel as though you're missing out on seeing something cool elsewhere.

In some ways, the game's parkour-style action is actually best suited for the Time Trial mode, which takes small portions of each level and adds checkpoints and a timer. This, of course, provides only as much entertainment as your patience will allow since you're memorizing lines rather than adapting to and utilizing the environment as you see it; but nailing a perfect run can still feel completely rewarding. Plus, you can upload your best times and ghosts of your runs to the game's servers, adding a little competitive motivation.

Unfortunately, not every aspect of the game shines quite as brightly as the pursuit action. The story, for instance, is something of a bait and switch. It jettisons its utopia-gone-awry premise almost immediately in favor of a rather cliché tale that centers on our heroine's attempts to clear her sister's name after she's framed for a politically motivated assassination. Yes, it's as unoriginal as it sounds and strangely, it doesn't conclude so much as it just stops dead as if the developers accidentally ran out of levels. But the biggest disappointment is that so many themes are left unexplored and the world as a whole lacks depth as a result.

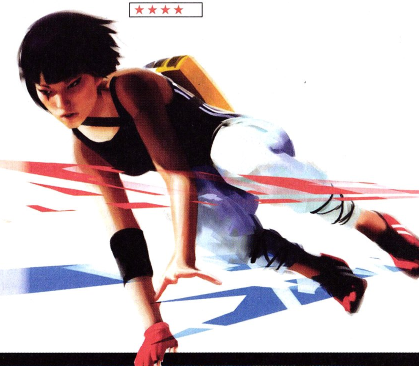
On top of that, the lone combat attack button delivers an anemic array of punches and kicks (depending on the context). A useful but simplistic disarm button, when mashed at just the right moment, automatically initiates a flashy, dynamic attack that leaves you wondering, "Why can't I control *that?"* Still, I wasn't too perturbed by the combat limitations given that the game actively discourages you from engaging enemies—a guideline that's generally easy to abide by (and which results in a Trophy, if you manage to not shoot anyone).

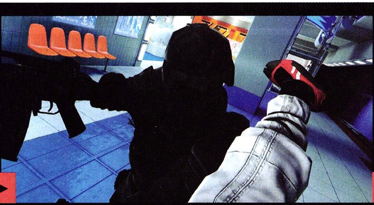
Also underwhelming is the less-publicized environmental puzzle portion, which forces you to climb or descend to a certain point by jumping between pipes or hanging from ledges…you know, old-school try-and-die platforming mechanics. Some of the puzzles are quite well constructed, but the concept as a whole doesn't play to the game's strengths. Intriguing scenarios and generous respawns help to keep it from becoming too frustrating, but ultimately, I'd rather be running.

Overall, however, the game does an admirable job of balancing the natural limitations of attempting to recreate parkour in an interactive medium. It doesn't always work, but when it does, it's magic. And though the story and combat aren't spectacular and the game occasionally descends into trial-and-error tedium, the core gameplay—coupled with solid design, visual, and technical work—delivers a totally worthwhile experience. And trust me, the game only gets more fun as your own skills improve.

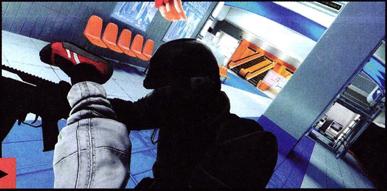
Scott Butterworth

★★★★



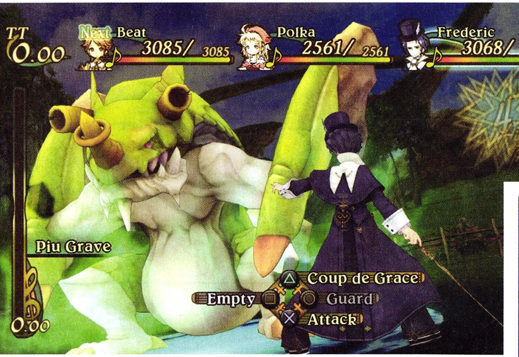


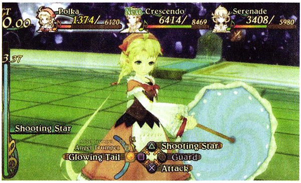
If ever you're forced into a confrontation, by far the easiest way to handle it is with a simple disarm, such as this one.



Disarming sequences function like a dynamic quick-time event: Hit the Triangle button at the proper moment to automatically trigger a pre-set move.

Every special attack gobbles up a set amount of time, so keep a peeper on the Action Gauge to make sure you can squeeze in an extra Coup de Grace or Shooting Star.





Yes, the game really is this pretty—but good looks aren't enough to compensate for the hokey, pokey cutscenes.

Eternal Sonata

The combat hits a high note, but the story falls flat

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai Games DEVELOPER: Tri-Crescendo

PS3 | R

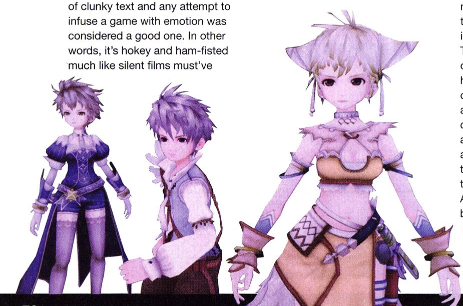
I'm not sure if *Eternal Sonata's* story is the product of the meandering musings of a self-indulgent madman or the result of a horrible experiment with a group of feuding fanfic writers huddled around a shared typewriter, but either way it's a jarring cacophony of trite tropes. Think of it as a tale that belongs in a bygone era—something that might have worked in the 16-bit days, when blocky sprites delivered cringe-worthy speeches in large chunks of clunky text and any attempt to infuse a game with emotion was considered a good one. In other words, it's hokey and ham-fisted much like silent films must've seemed when cinema made the grand transition to talkies.

And yet, playing *Eternal Sonata* is a lot like finding yourself in a conversation with a breathtakingly gorgeous yet utterly vapid hot chick* at a cocktail party. You want to turn away to save your brain from the mind-numbing mash-up of half-baked ideas—in this case, the fever dream of a dying Chopin transports us to a magical world in which mineral powder serves as a diabolical replacement for flower powder, thrust upon an unwitting populace by a tax-happy king with a nefarious ulterior motive—but you just can't stop staring at the game's staggering beauty. Heck, even the *sewers* in *Sonata's* richly realized world are a colorful sight to behold.

Of course, there's a payoff for paying attention: the action. Whenever it puts out, you can't help but put up with this game's inane blather just to get some more action. The core of any traditional Japanese role-player is its battle system, and developer Tri-Crescendo has once again delivered an innovative take on hybridized turn-based/action-oriented combat. All enemies are visible on screen (no random combat), and when you trigger a battle, all characters (friend and foe) take turns to complete their actions within a certain time limit, measured by a handy Action Gauge. Standard enough, but *Sonata* adds on layers of complexity by including an Echo Meter, which you can build up using normal attacks. The more Echoes you've got, the stronger your Special attacks, so strategic use of Special attacks becomes key to conquering everyday foes and surviving the sometimes-hellacious boss battles. Another interesting element: light and dark. Not only do your Special attacks vary depending on whether you're in shadows or sunlight, but some foes will also change form based on where they are. This leads to all kinds of nifty strategic choices, like using a knockback attack to slam a monster from darkness to light, then when it reverts to a weaker form, finishing it off with ease. Heck, you can even use the meager shadows cast by your own characters to your advantage—especially handy on certain battlefields where the light and dark regions shift under passing cloud cover. All in all, it makes for a sublimely fun experience, taking the grind out of level-grinding.

Too bad about that story, though. A game this pretty should be a no-brainer, but as soon as the characters open their mouths, your beleaguered brain will ache for a return to the action. Gary Steinman

★★★½



***No sexism here.** Feel free to replace "hot chick" with hunky dude, cuddly farm animal, alien invader...or whatever else floats your boat.

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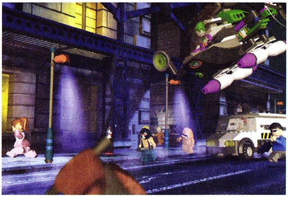
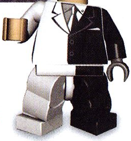
An assortment of tech suits give Batman and Robin special abilities, like clinging to metal surfaces or withstanding searing heat.



Yes, woman in the pink jumpsuit, flee in terror at the Joker's presence! (The vehicles are a blast to control, by the way.)



The lineup of villains is a Who's Who of Batman baddies, from the Joker to Man-Bat.

LEGO Batman repeatedly references the 1989 *Batman* film. One scene shows the Batwing silhouetted against the moon, for example.

LEGO Batman

Happily, more of the same

PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+ PUBLISHER: Warner Bros. Interactive DEVELOPER: Traveller's Tales

Trip off the reservation for a quick moment! Get married, yes, you, and your initially exciting significant other might suddenly dress in sweats and gain a few, ahem, *dozen* pounds. But at least you know where you can "get some" when the, er, itch strikes. The same off-kilter logic could be applied to the *LEGO* series, settled comfortably into its own little niche. Sure, it's no longer glamorous (and runs brazenly close to a pony named "One-Trick"), but to me, consistency and reliability outweigh superficial flashiness (and I'm not married).

LEGO Batman certainly doesn't revolutionize the basic idea of its *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* predecessors. You still jaunt around a LEGO world beating up bad guys, shattering a substantial portion of the scenery, and amassing a vast number of collectibles to unlock new stuff.

That sounds awfully simple, I know. But the smashing is so satisfying, and the near-constant stream of unlockables so rewarding, that the game ends up as addictive as they come. And *Batman* does add a few new wrinkles to the *LEGO* formula, most notably the inclusion of two separate campaigns: one for Batman and Robin, and one for their foes. The storylines parallel one another, but take place in different areas of the same environments, so the experience stays fresh and rewarding.

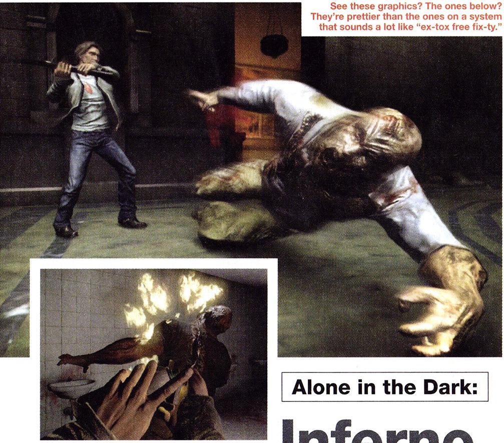
Even double-dipping across the two tracks, the game is pretty short from start to finish. But that's only if you ignore the powerful incentives to return to each level in Free Play mode to track down all the collectibles. Now you can switch between unlocked characters (and Batman and Robin's different tech suits) on the fly, providing access to areas impossible to reach in the main story mode.

And this no-pressure free-for-all highlights another of the *LEGO* games' biggest strengths: At any point a second player can drop in for co-op play. Since the core controls and directions are so simple (and so forgiving with its unlimited lives) it's ideal for quality gaming time with kids, spouses, or parents. And the emphasis on teamwork, with each character using unique abilities to help his or her partner advance, makes even the least videogame-savvy loved one feel needed.

Entertaining as it is, though, *LEGO Batman* has areas of frustration. The sometimes-slippery controls make activities like climbing ladders and jumping onto button switches challenging for even seasoned players. And the occasionally perplexing camera allows foreground objects to obscure the characters far too frequently.

These irritations do pale next to the sheer entertainment value packed into the game. It may not break much new ground, but *LEGO Batman* is a total blast anyway, for both newbies and veterans. And isn't that what's important? Joe Rybicki

★★★★



See these graphics? The ones below? They're prettier than the ones on a system that sounds a lot like "ex-tox free fix-ty."

Play with a lighter and you'll start a fire. Good! That's the only way to kill some enemies.

Alone in the Dark: Inferno

Flames fix everything—even a once-terrible game

PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Atari DEVELOPER: Eden Studios

Like adding a bucket of rum to a stale Coke instantly revitalizes an unappetizing beverage, adding a single word to *Alone in the Dark's* title has seemingly enhanced it from a problem-riddled mess to a palatable romp through a demonic New York. Honest, just one word!

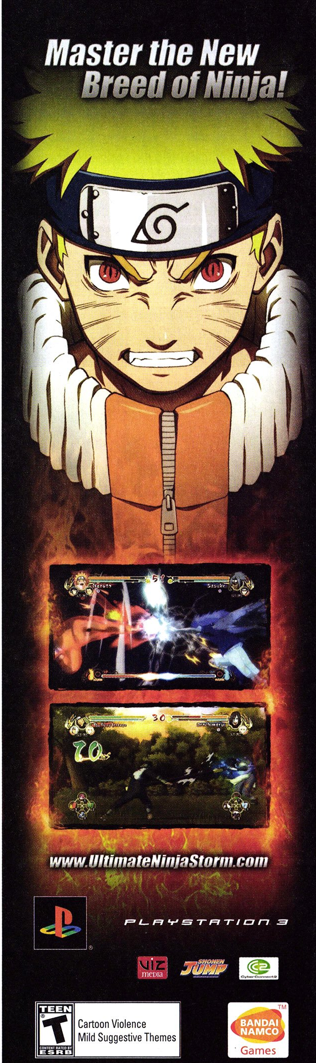
When released in June 2008 for *other* platforms, critics lambasted the horror adventure for its lousy controls, technical glitches, and unfortunate design decisions. But now, *Alone in the Dark: Inferno* (yes, we PS3 owners are treated to the superior *Inferno* version!) fixes most of the problems that made its lesser-titled brethren so aggravating.

The awful fixed third-person camera has been replaced with a more useful, freely movable one. The once-awkward close-quarters combat has been refined. The elimination of one item (flashlight batteries) has removed nearly all of the frustration from managing the restrictive inventory system. Driving the hotwirable cars that litter the game—while still not perfect—is enhanced by weight and responsiveness. Additionally, *Inferno* gets a noticeable visual bump for the PS3 (a victory for PS3 fanboys around the world, yay!), a massive fetch-quest near the end of the game is now mostly optional, and there's a new subway-chase level that's almost scary.

The combined effect of all these fixes is that it's finally possible to appreciate *Alone* for the innovative experience that was hidden inside the earlier mess. Set in a freely explorable (but devastated) mock-up of New York's Central Park, *Inferno* follows Edward Carnby as he races to discover an apocalyptic secret within the park. Standing between him and humanity's salvation are an army of demonic mutants, many of which can only be killed by fire. Or more specifically, by the bombs and flaming bullets you can make from booze bottles, aerosol sprays, and other seemingly innocuous items littered around the park; or by the hunks of furniture that can be set on fire and wielded like flaming clubs.

Figuring out interesting ways to use your makeshift arsenal against enemies and puzzles is almost fascinating enough to offset the fact that, as a horror game, *Alone* is never actually frightening. It's definitely clever and fun, though, and *Inferno's* raft of improvements is enough to finally make *Alone* worth your attention. Mikel Reparaz

★★★½



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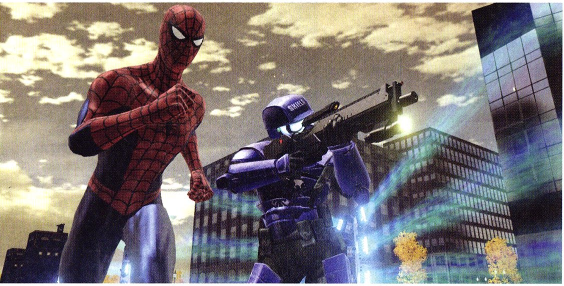


Though technically an open world game, you'll typically have only one source of missions at a time, making the experience rather linear.

Spider-Man: Web of Shadows

Not heroic, but still pretty super

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: Shaba Games/Treyarch

You never know what to expect with superhero games. Quality can range from reasonably cool to outrageously bad, and even those that look good early on don't always pan out. Thankfully, *Spider-Man: Web of Shadows* did pan out…for the most part. It suffers from a few issues that, while hardly game breaking, are persistent and prominent enough to detract from the overall experience, but it also gets a lot right—most notably the story.

In short, Venom shows up in New York and starts breeding a legion of violent mini-clones out of its citizens until the city gradually becomes a hellish symbiote hive. What's great, though, is that the game convincingly creates a desperate situation with its well-paced narrative (and ominous visual details) and demonstrates a real love of the source material through endearingly playful cutscenes and dialogue.

Having also been infected by Venom, Spider-Man can instantly swap between red and black suits, each with its own upgradable moves and unique abilities. The difference isn't dramatic, but the agility versus power dichotomy deepens the combat system—which is already impressively fun, especially early on when the game provides you with interesting foes.

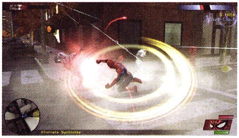
Unfortunately, the beat-'em-up delight eventually wears off as you'll all too often find yourself fighting the same old goons and simply mashing square or abusing the Web-Strike attack. And though the game attempts to let you fight on the ground, walls, and open air, an uncooperative camera and unintuitive targeting system can sometimes ruin the fun.

Also, the game's open world crime-fighting format lacks original qualities, missions grow increasingly tedious (an annoyance exacerbated by the infuriatingly useless mini-map), and the unresponsive controls diminish the simple joy of swinging through the city. And with the exception of Spider-Man's spectacular animations, the technical work is generally sloppy.

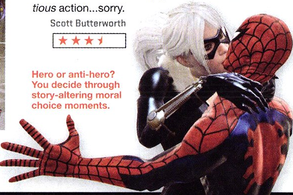
But despite this mild lack of polish, *Web of Shadows* makes Spider-Man fun, and fans and non-fans alike should enjoy the game's *infectious* action...sorry.

Scott Butterworth

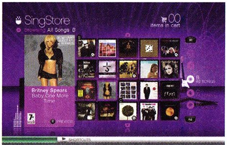
★★★½



The camera can be troubling at times, but it performs admirably during combat. The dramatic use of slow-motion is great.



Hero or anti-hero? You decide through story-altering moral choice moments.



Buy *SingStar Vol. 2* if you want an eclectic mix of songs for your parties. Head to SingStore if you're more particular.

SingStar Vol. 2

There is an upside to being deaf!

PS3 PRICE: $39.99 (game only); $59.99 (with microphones) ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: SCEE

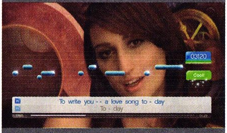
Only On PlayStation
PLAYSTATION 3
singstar
+ SingStore
Vol. 2

Like a new season of American Idol, the first thing you notice when you pop in *SingStar Vol. 2* is that it's curiously similar to the last one. That's not all bad considering *Vol. 1* earned four-stars from us, thanks primarily to its online components: SingStore which allows additional track purchases to build your song library, and My SingStar Online which lets you view and share SingStar performances with other superstar wannabes.

Vol. 2 comes with the usual hit-or-miss collection of songs with gameplay enhancements limited to a new Harmony Duet mode and individually selectable difficulty settings for multiplayer. But while *Vol. 2* essentially offers the same experience as its predecessor, it does create a question for any *Vol. 1* owner with an Internet-connected PS3: Would you rather pay $40 for 30 pre-selected songs or download 25 songs you actually like from SingStore? Hmm...

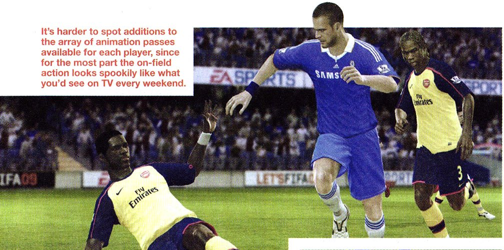
Roger Burchill

★★★½

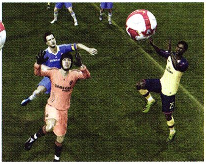


Is Sara Bareilles singing me a love song or am I really singing a love song to myself?

At first, the Teen rating for a singing game seemed silly. But then my four-year-old starting going around singing, *"Give it to me, baby! Uh-huh! Uh-huh!"* Thanks, *SingStar!* and The Offspring.



It's harder to spot additions to the array of animation passes available for each player, since for the most part the on-field action looks spookily like what you'd see on TV every weekend.



Pause, then spin the camera around to capture cool moments.

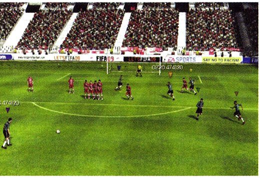
FIFA 09

Proof that playing left-back isn't just for the little wheezy kids

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Everyone GENRE: Sports PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: EA Sports

Possibly the best thing to ever happen to the *FIFA* franchise is Konami's *Pro Evolution Soccer.* Nothing like strong competition to force a redoubling of efforts, reapplication of priorities, and reassessment of fundamentals. For the *FIFA* team the recent *UEFA* game was the first clear statement of new intent. This annual iteration builds on that step forward in on-field action, and adds on-PlayStation Network support that's as exciting for true soccer fans as any checklisted feature addition could possibly be.

At its heart, *FIFA* showcases all the highlights of its past lives, with a few interesting tweaks. The on-field players are smaller than previous years, allowing more of the pitch to be visible as you're trying to figure out moves, rather than pinballing the ball in quick passes to those players in your direct short-view sight. It seems, having been reviewing *FIFA* games since the '96 version on PC, I'm never ever going to understand or effectively manipulate my teammate AI, and will always be frustrated by obvious passes going astray and missed tackles. Instead, I'll focus on the depth of the manager mode that lets me take my English Championship Sheffield United team through league and cup glory, and wheeling and dealing for additions to my squad.

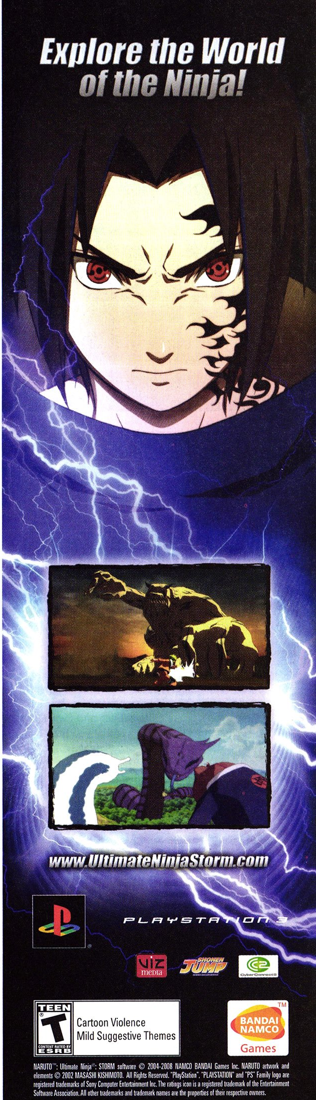


Arrows indicate all the other real players on your team, jostling for position in 10-on-10 mode..

But I suspect the bulk of my time to now be spent refining my craft at right- and left-back or on the wide right side of midfield, where I try to play in the 10-on-10 Be A Pro online mode. Building on the five-on-five option last year, this full integration of all ten outfield positions as real people has terrific potential. In our controlled test of the system, it worked flawlessly, and was easy to follow as arrows dictated the position I should be on the field, along with providing rewards or red-text warnings when I missed a pass, tackle, or was woefully out of position. Over the next few months I expect a good 20-plus teams to compete effectively in worldwide competition. I doubt I'll make that kind of grade, but if ever *FIFA* wanted for an obvious leg up on its *PES* competition, this mode is it. You'll find me trying, and trying out for the next several months, for sure.

Rob Smith

★★★★



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Some environments offer, um, beautiful views. (But what you can't see here is how much of the level is blocked off by invisible walls.)

Golden Axe: Beast Rider

Hellooooooooo, Tyris. Goodbye, franchise

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: SEGA DEVELOPER: Secret Level

Roger ♥s Tyris

» As a connoisseur of classic games, Roger's initial reaction to *Golden Axe's* new heroine was: "Hey, what in the hell happened to He-Man?" But then her thighs...er, their eyes met: "Oh Tyris, straddle me!"

PS3 | R

PS2 | R

Sure, *Golden Axe: Beast Rider* gives it the old college try: A modestly clever counter system hints at depth in this hack 'n' slash revival of the '80s arcade classic. Each enemy attack is color-coded to prompt heroine **Tyris Flare** to either evade or parry, and then respond with brutal counters tailor-made for various enemy types. This system *should* make battles tense and varied.

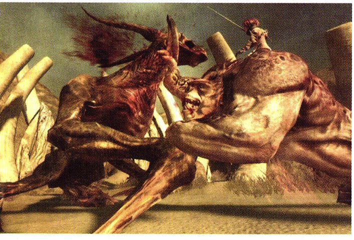
What *actually* happens is that you hack, hack, hack at enemies, *occasionally-maybe-accidentally* hitting an appropriate counter, but more often getting nailed mid-animation thanks to awful controls and an uncooperative camera. What is a potentially satisfying and complex system devolves into X, X, X, with a little X, X, Square to mix things up.

The various beastly mounts also offer the *potential* (notice a trend?) of some strategy, since each creature carries its own unique handful of attacks. But each creature's health is so pitifully low—and Tyris so laughably easy to knock off her mount—that I spent more time backtracking to find a new mount than I did riding any of them. That wasn't much of a loss, though; I preferred to be on foot than wrestle with the dreadful beast control anyway. If that wasn't bad enough, the glitchy, jerky graphics are further ravaged by a spastic camera that literally had me woozy at times.

Unusually forgiving action gamers may find some enjoyment exploring *Golden Axe's* occasionally striking environments, playing find-the-invisible-wall (hint: look *anywhere),* ogling its exhibitionist heroine [Roger: "What're you insinuating, Joe?"], or deconstructing its comically cliché fantasy story. I, however, did not.

Joe Rybicki

★½



Battling on beast-back is laughably awkward; since creatures can't turn quickly, you spend a lot of time swiping at air.

CHALLENGER!
ROBERT
60
CHALLENGER!
GEESE
RUSH 2 HITS
CREDIT 00

Luxury comes at a price: if your TV is too fancy, you'll spot some animation glitches.

King of Fighters '98 Ultimate Match

Not quite ultimate, but close

PS2 PRICE: $19.99 ESRB: Teen
PUBLISHER: Ignition Entertainment
DEVELOPER: SNK Playmore

Erect shrine. Insert cart of *KOF '98*. Worship. To many die-hard fans, *King of Fighters '98* remains the pinnacle of the series. The huge character line-up and excellent balance provided the best 2D fighter SNK ever made for head-to-head team play.

A decade later, *Ultimate Match* is a mostly successful attempt to improve on the seemingly untouchable. It adds 10 more characters (64 altogether), plus even more balance tuning and new options to mix and match your favorite evasion moves and power-meter settings. SNK's graphical update has flaws—while the new 3D backgrounds look great, interlacing glitches affect the sprites on high-end TVs. Still, if you've read this far, that detail is not going to put you off, and a $20 price tag makes this a heck of a deal for hardcore 2D fighter fans.

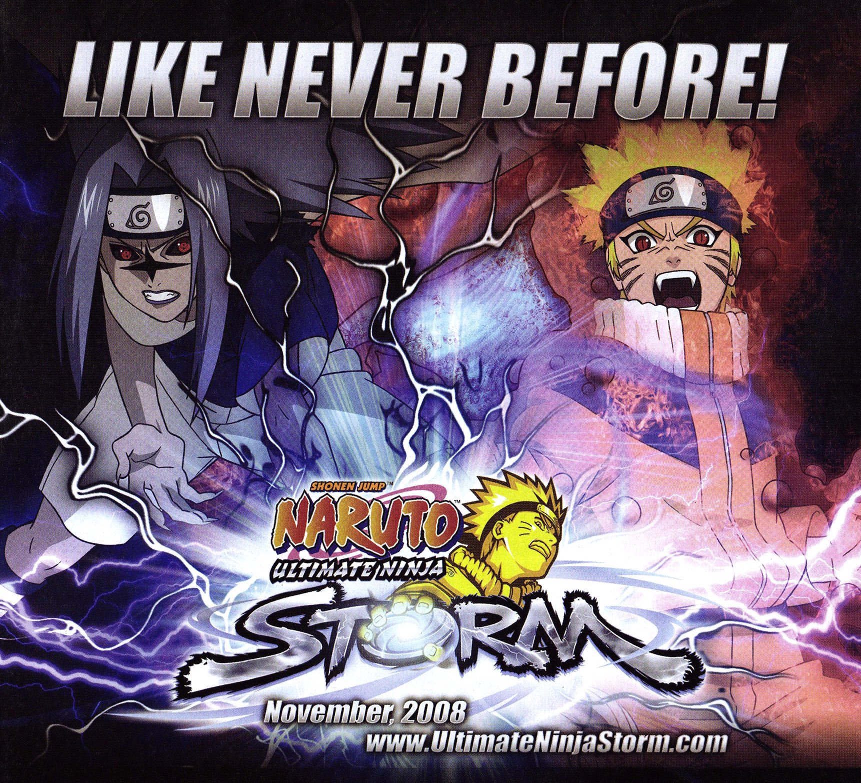
D. F. Smith

★★★★

1P
60
OMEGA RUGAL
RUSH 3 HITS

Wow, if you can kick that high, buddy, you're in the wrong business. Next stop: Broadway! and *A Chorus Line*.

***KOF '98* was quite the reunion tour**—altogether, the fighters on the roster first appeared in no less than a dozen different games.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Lee
65
Itachi
Kakashi
6 Hits

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TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Cartoon Violence
Mild Suggestive Themes

PLAYSTATION 3

viz media

SHONEN JUMP

CyberConnect2

BANDAI NAMCO Games

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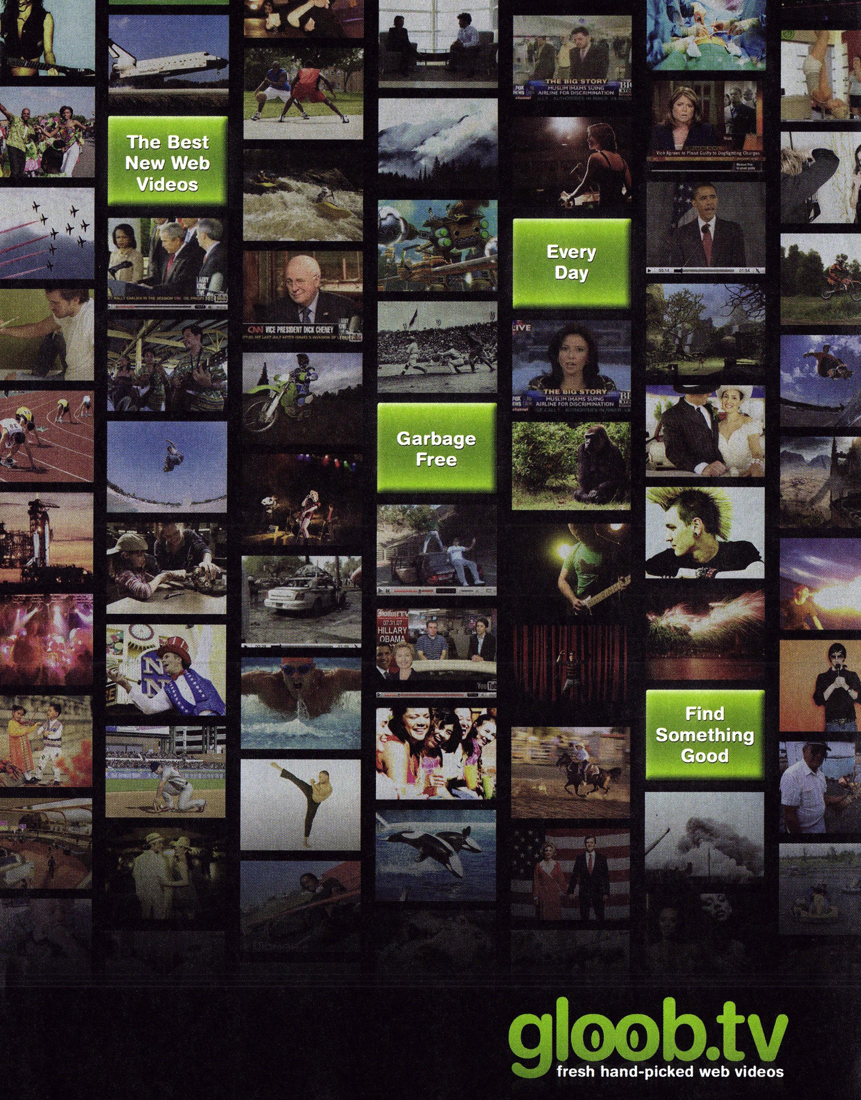
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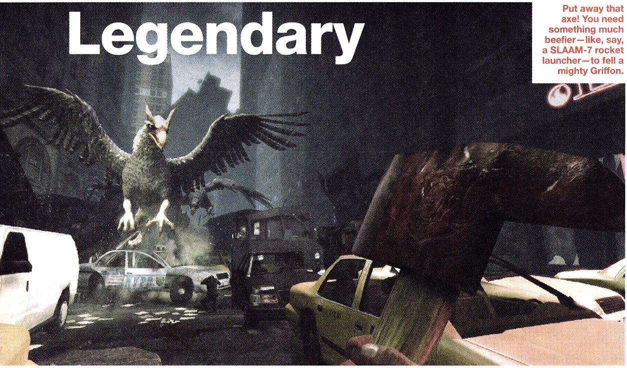
Legendary



Put away that axe! You need something much beefier—like, say, a SLAAM-7 rocket launcher—to fell a mighty Griffon.

Griffons and golems and Minotaur, oh my!

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Mature
PUBLISHER: Gamecock Media Group
DEVELOPER: Spark Unlimited

Legendary is a shooter with pretensions. I say this realizing full well that *Fallout 3* and *BioShock* can be accused of the same thing, but the difference is: Both those games pull it off. *Legendary* does not.

For starters: the story. Starring a thief named Deckard who inadvertently opens Pandora's Box unleashing a host of deadly mythical creatures upon the world, *Legendary's* ambitious plot might seem equally at home on the glossy pages of a sophisticated graphic novel as the crinkled loose leaf in a pimply teenager's Trapper Keeper. Too bad the convoluted, underdeveloped yarn leans toward the latter, unraveling at the slightest tug from such weighty forces as logic and consistency.

◄ The signet on Deckard's arm lets him absorb Animus, storing it up for powerful blasts or to heal his wounds.

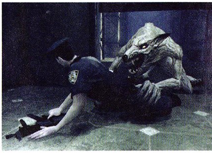
Next: the gameplay. Imagine, if you will, walking down an endless corridor, punching everything that pops up squarely in the snoot. Doesn't sound all that captivating, does it? And yet, if you smooth out some of the kinks and curves within *Legendary's* levels, that's basically what you're getting here. No branching paths, no multiple options for tackling an area, almost no way to get lost, with a woefully limited arsenal of weaponry to tackle both your mythical and human foes. Despite the outward appearance of layered, nuanced levels, I couldn't find a single alternate route in the entire game!

And yet *Legendary* still manages to be a total hoot—once you get out of New York, that is. The first third of the game is far too stiff and has way too much try-and-die gameplay for my tastes. As soon as I landed in London, though, *Legendary* had me hooked enough to constantly crave a peek around the next corner, even though I pretty much knew what to expect. The dramatic set pieces and highly scripted levels proved to be thoroughly engaging, and the occasional boss battles were bombastically overblown in a "holy crap that's really cool!" kinda way. Even the smaller moments—like using my Animus blast to force the ethereal Nari to materialize, then gunning down those creepy childlike creatures—proved to be engaging the millionth time I did it. Another moment that almost never got old: blasting the heads off werewolves in order to finish off those baddies. Cathartic!

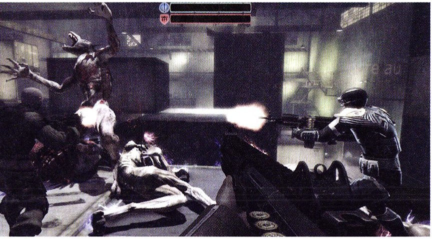
A word of advice, though: Suspend your disbelief. Heck, suspend your entire brain while you're at it. *Legendary* is mindless fun, and it's at its best when you don't pay too much mind to the incoherent story and limited gameplay.

Gary Steinman

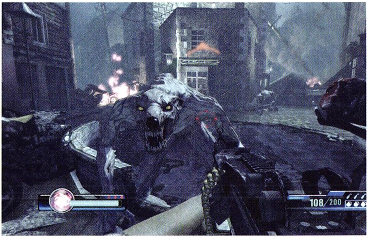
★★★



His gun says no, but his hips say "Oh, yes!" Oh Wolfy, when will you ever know true love?



A limited but surprisingly diverting multiplayer mode pits the game's two factions against each other, competing to collect Animus from angry werewolves.



It's not enough to simply take down your lycanthropic foes. You'll need to shoot, burn, hack, or blow their heads off in order to stop them from regenerating.

In the 2005 adult video *Pandora's Box*, the eponymous temptress is played by the aptly named Venus. How mythical!

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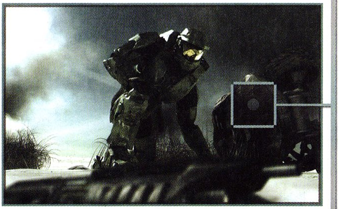

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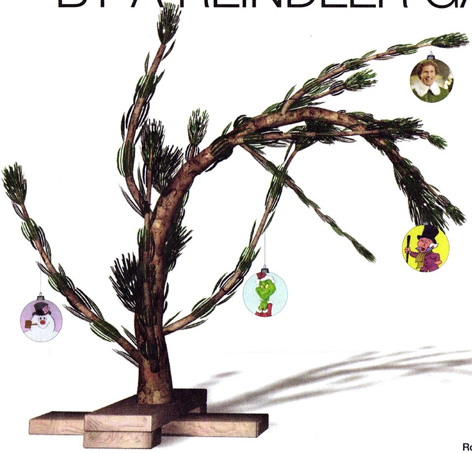
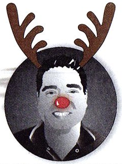
GLAD TIDINGS FOR A GAMING HOLIDAY SEASON

GRANDMA GOT RUN OVER BY A REINDEER GAME



Putting the "fun" back into dysfunctional family gatherings

Aaaah! The holidays. 'Tis the season of good cheer, peace on earth, and goodwill towards your fellow man. For some, like Roger, it's a chance for the family to gather and strengthen the bonds between generations old and new. For others, like Rob, it's a stark reminder of why he emigrated 6,000 miles. But whether you believe in the spirit of Christmas or are adamant that it's all a humbug, there's one enduring universal reason for the season: Games. Multiplayer games to be exact. Games that allow you to connect with your dear kin—especially Aunt Mary, who's had a wee bit too much eggnog…or afford a reason to excuse yourself from the presence of creepy Uncle Jack, who insists you're never too old to sit on his lap. So come all ye gaming faithful, and have yourself a merry multiplayer Christmas.



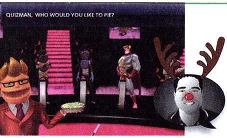
Roger the Red-nosed Reindeer

vs.

Robineezer Scrooge

Brain vs. Brawn

A trivial pursuit for the criminal mastermind

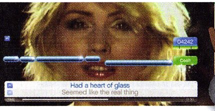


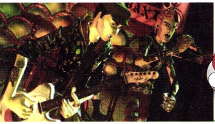
GAME: Buzz! Quiz TV **SYSTEM:** PS3 **MULTIPLAYER:** Up to 8 (Online: Up to 4)

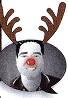
ROGER: Rob, Rob, Rob…Is that really your name? Or judging by your brand of multiplayer mayhem, is that how you acquire your Christmas "gifts?" In these trying social and economic times, it's easy to turn one's back on Christmas and all it represents. All the more reason to come together, reconnect, cleave to family and friends, and tap into the karmic bond of our human existence—a commonality of experience that surrounds us, penetrates us, and binds the galaxy together. And what better way to celebrate that spirit of brotherhood than with a rousing round of *Buzz! Quiz TV*? Just imagine it: A contest of pop culture intellect with the warm, restorative embrace of social interaction. A melding of heart and mind, if you will. Awww, who wants a hug?

GAME: Grand Theft Auto IV **SYSTEM:** PS3 **MULTIPLAYER:** Online: Up to 16

ROB: Roger, you sad, unfortunate man. Aren't you even mildly disturbed that the ethos you espouse melds so seamlessly with the pseudo-spiritual ramblings of the man responsible for Jar Jar Binks? *You say Merry Christmas…I say Midi-chlorians…let's call the whole thing off!* So while you're off seeking inappropriate cuddle sessions with ol' St. Nick, I'll be absorbing the life lessons of St. Niko Bellic, thank you very much. After all, my rampage on the multiplayer streets of Liberty City will have the dual benefit of ceasing all conversation with, and amongst, my horrified relatives, while being banished from the family room so I can engage in further criminal shenanigans with my online brethren.







Pop vs. Rock

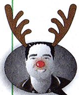
Sing along…bang a gong…get it on

GAME: SingStar **SYSTEM:** PS3 **MULTIPLAYER:** Up to 8

ROGER: Posture if you must, Rob, but music soothes the savage psychopath wannabe. And if Christmas carolers and their festive songs of the season aren't enough to sate you, might I suggest you invite your loving clan to join in on a rousing session of *SingStar!?* Young and old alike will enjoy exhibiting their vocal stylings with an ever-growing catalog of the hottest contemporary pop songs. Post photos and videos of your performances to My SingStar Online and you'll have a digital memory of your family fun all year long!

GAME: Rock Band 2 **SYSTEM:** PS3 **MULTIPLAYER:** Up to 4 (Online: Up to 4)

ROB: Are you mad, Burchill? I'd prefer a humiliating turn as a topless drunkard in a Brits Gone Wild video to actually chronicling my nightmare before Christmas for posterity. And just look at this song list…The Cardigans…Warrant…*Britney Spears!* If shame myself I must, I'll be donning a mini-me-esque plastic Fender and rocking out to the likes of AC/DC, System of a Down, and The Who. And if I can get just one octogenarian to rail on about how the music's too loud and the words unintelligible, I'll still be able to respect myself in the morning.



Fun vs. Run!

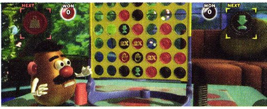
Kickin' it old school

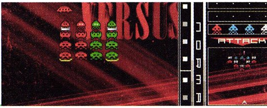
GAME: Hasbro Family Game Night **SYSTEM:** PS2 **MULTIPLAYER:** Up to 4

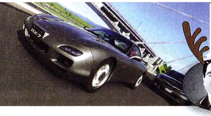
ROGER: You give me no choice, Rob. The only antidote for your Grinch-like attitude towards the holidays is…the classic family board game! Updated for the digital generation, of course. You won't be able to resist the allure of such traditional family favorites as Connect Four, Battleship, Boggle, Sorry!, and…Yahtzee! Yes, Yahtzee!, Rob. Say it with me…Yaht…zee! "Yule" love it.

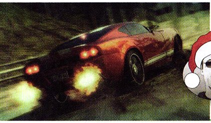
GAME: Space Invaders Extreme **SYSTEM:** PSP **MULTIPLAYER:** Up to 2

ROB: Really, Roger…board games?! Bored games is more like it. If I'm going old school, I refuse to venture back beyond 1978, so I'll load up the Extreme reinterpretation of Space Invaders on my PSP and make a dash from the festivities. Normally, I don't associate with relatives, but I'll be charitable and make an exception for dear cousin Rufus and his PSP, just for some head-to-head action.









Dash vs. Crash

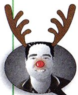
The real driving simulator faces the high-speed stimulator

GAME: Gran Turismo 5: Prologue **SYSTEM:** PS3 **MULTIPLAYER:** Up to 2 (Online: Up to 16)

ROGER: Well, if intellectual challenges, aural titillation, and classic gaming can't snap you out of your seasonal funk, a few adrenaline-inducing laps in a race car should do it. Who can resist the compelling blend of skill and precision, control and courage, as you speed around gloriously rendered hi-def tracks? And what better Christmas gift than a garage, albeit virtual, full of the most desirable automobiles in the world. *Fairy tales can come true, it could happen to you…*

GAME: Burnout Paradise **SYSTEM:** PS3 **MULTIPLAYER:** Online: Up to 8

ROB: It's time you drove back from Fairyland, Roger. There is no Santa Claus, and in the real-world, your family isn't going to be enthralled by your surgical dissection of the same track 54 times in a row so you can afford a better ride than an '07 Suzuki Swift. (Look, mommy! I managed 42mpg!) But you may actually be on to something: *Burnout Paradise*…multiple rounds of tequila shots…crashes galore! What laughs we'll share as I shuffle the in-laws out the door for their long drive home at the end of the night!



Gain vs. Pain

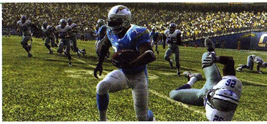
Pain is only temporary but victory is forever

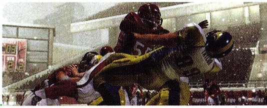
GAME: Madden NFL 09 **SYSTEM:** PS3 **MULTIPLAYER:** Up to 4 (Online: Up to 2)

ROGER: You are an evil, evil man, Mr. Smith. I will pray for your blackened soul: "Dear Lord, lead us to victory over our heathen opponent. Deliver our Hail Mary's to safe hands and allow us to smite this non-believer with a grueling ground game and punishing defense so that we may claim the Christmas Bowl 2008 trophy—in your name. Amen!" Yes, Robenezer, you may be able to resist the spirits of Christmases past, present, and future, but I know you cannot resist the spirit of gridiron competition!

GAME: Blitz: The League II **SYSTEM:** PS3 **MULTIPLAYER:** Up to 2 (Online: Up to 2)

ROB: Damn you! You've enticed me with your reindeer games! But I suggest you utilize every bit of *Madden's* Adaptive Difficulty Engine as your "game," like the Christmas gravy, is thin and weak. And once you've discovered that your feeble skills are no match for the power of the Dark Side, we shall proceed on to *Blitz,* where I shall present you with your gift: Pain! Pain! And more pain! Merry Christmas indeed, Roger.



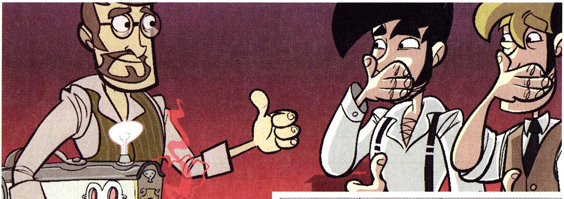


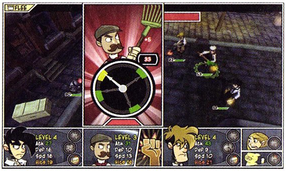
PlayStation Network Games

Quirky downloadable games for less than the price of a theme park souvenir t-shirt. We say Yea or Nay.

+ **YEA** You'll get full value for your money.

- **NAY** No legs, no fun, no value.





Penny Arcade Adventures: On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness, Episode One

PRICE: $14.99 **DEVELOPER:** Hothead Games

+ Not everyone comprehends, enjoys, or has necessarily even encountered Penny Arcade's odd brand of gamer-centric humor. To paint a picture: Imagine a giant robot with evil red eyes violating an orange with its giant, fruit-squeezing crotch. Yep, love it or hate it, that's Penny Arcade for you. Just like the content of many of the comic strips, this game is definitely M-rated.

Told in comic book style, this adventure-RPG begins with your custom-created character's house being squashed under the foot of the above-mentioned robot. From there, the story spirals into the markedly *weird,* involving mimes, clowns, urine, and hobo meat as you gather clues, play mini-games, and solve quest after quest, all while on a bigger mission of tracking down that robot. It's an enjoyable foray into the nostalgic realm of adventure games.

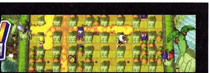
The combat utilizes an active-time turn-based system. That means, you have to wait for "heroes" Tycho, Gabe, and your Item, Attack, and Special Attack bars to fill, and while you're fumbling between them to choose your moves (scrolling through items is especially frustrating), enemies can attack. To execute a real-time block (hit R2 or L2 right before the attack makes contact), you need to interrupt queuing your own attacks. It's a bit of a hassle, and clumsier than necessary, but after some practice, it's manageable. Of course, like in most RPGs, your characters can level up and upgrade their weapons.

For 15 bucks, the five- to eight-hours worth of unusual yet polished storytelling and gameplay should please any Penny Arcade, adventure, or RPG fan. For the rest of you, the easily obtainable Trophies should be enough to pique your interest. Teresa Dun

Coming Soon

Bomberman Ultra

AVAILABLE: Winter **PUBLISHER:** Hudson



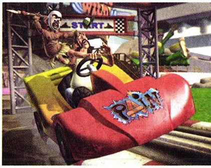
You can't go wrong. *Bomberman* is the quintessential multiplayer game and an absolutely perfect addition to the PlayStation Network stable of must-haves. What? This is supposed to be a preview, not a review? Well, it's *Bomberman,* from the original creators, so you must know what you're getting: Tons of modes, including Classic. Tons of variables to customize the look of your Bomberman. Tons of in-game rules and details to define to your liking. Multiplayer includes four-player online and seven-player on a single PS3. Perfect.

PLAYSTATION STORE

Our favorite download from the PlayStation Store this month:

▶ LINGER IN SHADOWS

Is it art? Is it a story? Or is it something else altogether? Whatever the case, this interactive experience is definitely NOT a game. For a paltry $2.99, it's worth exploring—even if you're only after the Trophies.



PAIN: Amusement Park

PRICE: $5.99 **DEVELOPER:** Idol Minds

+ *Arrgh! Smack! Kaboom! Splat!* If those sounds—and any other similarly punishing effects you can imagine—bring a smile to your face, *PAIN: Amusement Park* is certainly worth its admission price. The add-on to the quirky-bawdry-sadistic *PAIN* is even more perversely enjoyable since the closer confines of the theme park setting allow for longer and more elaborate combo chains than in the original's cityscape, and it's jam-packed with interactive features and secrets. Additional single- and multiplayer modes offer variations on the theme with the deductive HOT n COLD being the most distinct. The unimaginative may complain that the fun still ends too soon, but *PAIN* aficionados know that the real pleasure comes in finding new and more excruciating ways to prolong the agony. Roger Burchill

Give PlayStation: The Official Magazine

This Holiday Season

PlayStation 3 · PlayStation Portable · PlayStation Network · PlayStation 2
PlayStation
The Official Magazine
AUGUST 08
EXCLUSIVE
LittleBIGPlanet
Don't Be Alarmed! Sackboy just wants to take over the planet!
See inside the creative world that EVERY PS3 owner will play
First Details QUANTUM OF SOLACE Play as the coolest ever JAMES BOND!
HANDS-ON IMPRESSIONS RESISTANCE 2 MADDEN NFL 09 WWE SMACKDOWN VS RAW 2009
GTA4 Free Modes! Top picks to spice up your online game
Exclusive Hands-on with crossover brawler
MORTAL KOMBAT VS DC UNIVERSE
Batman vs. Sub-Zero Superman vs. Scorpion Flash vs. Sonya Blade
PlayStation
The Official Magazine
JULY 08
METAL GEAR SOLID 4
GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS
TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION
WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW
Never-before-revealed DETAILS
NEW LOCATIONS unveiled
The definitive word on the PS3's defining SYSTEM-SELLER
18 PREVIEWS FALLOUT 3 LEGO BATMAN AND MORE...
SILENT HILL HOMECOMING THE MOST DISTURBING PREVIEW EVER!
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Mercenaries 2
Battlefield: Bad Company
Aliens: Colonial Marines
Future

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Letters

Feedback, Insight, Dreamy Rob, and Visceral Product Testing

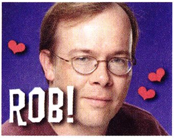
A RANDOM LINE THAT MAKES SNAKE ANGRY, WHEN TAKEN OUT OF CONTEXT:

"Disappointed…I settled with *Metal Gear Solid 4* instead."

–Robert Burns, via email

73

Number of people who asked for a *Final Fantasy* game to be re-released on the PSN



CAMERA SHY

How come no one other than Rob shows their face in PTOM? Is it because you guys (and girl) are so awesome that the moment I open one of your mags I'll burst into cold flames?

Monty, via email

That's *exactly* why! You're clever, Monty. It has nothing to do with the fact that we're self-conscious or terrified of the criticism-wielding masses who'd rip us apart for having slightly uneven eyebrows or a crooked nose. Nothing at all. On another note, did you suggest that Rob is un-awesome? On another other note, check back next issue for a behind-the-scenes look at the photo shoot we did for our Holiday Gift Guide! You'll finally get to see our faces…sort of.

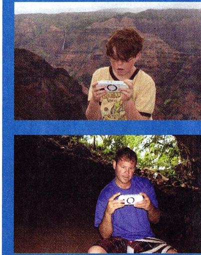
A SITTING DUCK

When I got my PS3 when it first came out I heard rumors about its strength. After many hours a day playing it, I decided to take it outside and shoot it with my airsoft gun. There wasn't even a dent on it! I upgraded to a bow and arrows, and a corner came off. After I duct taped it, it still worked!

Dan Pritchard, via email

Dan, you shot your PS3 with weapons. How can we possibly respond to that…handsome man?

PSP SPOTTING



Jack and John Nollar. Keep sending PSPing pics to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com!

ARMORED SCORE

A giant robot ran off with the review score for *Armored Core: For Answer* in the December 08 issue. Really. The game received:

★½

Oddest letter of the month: Zachery Miller's five-paragraph interpretation of the interactive artwork *Linger in Shadows* (available on the PSN), involving "bowels of the Earth," "souls of the ancient life," and "black mists of times forgotten."

LETTER OF THE MONTH

IF SHANE GOT A NICKEL FOR EVERY TIME GAME CRITICS USED THE WORD *BEEP*

A few months ago, Shane wrote in complaining that game critics were overusing a certain word, but we didn't tell you what that word was. The word, Shane adamantly declared, did *not* mean vicious, brutal, lifelike, realistic, grimy, or gritty, though writers were using it if it did. Then we had you guess the word. Here are some of your most amusing guesses—it's amazing how far off some of them were—along with an eloquent explanation of the correct word.

The word has to be "next-gen."

–RaShaun J.

My spidey sense tells me the word is "raw."

–Jeremy Rhea

"Epic"!

–T. J. Parker

I think the word is "AI."

–Cole Preston

"Graphic."

–John Enfield

Wow, what a vicious, brutal, lifelike, realistic, grimy, gritty image… It's so very, dare we say, *visceral?*

And the correct answer is…

I'm going with "visceral." "Viscera" basically means "guts," and "visceral" can mean "related to guts." "Visceral" can also mean "something you feel in your guts." When I was in high school and I saw a couple smooching, it had such an effect on me that my tummy hurt. I had a visceral reaction. Even more broadly, "visceral" can mean "profound." When a reviewer says a game has visceral graphics, she means the images deeply affected her. It's kind of neat how one definition seems to lead to another, isn't it?

Paul Deaville II, Jennings, LA

We give Paul an "A" in linguistics. Excellent work. And Shane, we hope you feel better now that we've helped expose the "conspiracy" behind the excessive, visceral usages of the word "visceral!"

contact

Send your thoughts and comments to PTOM_letters@futureus.com. Especially if you find uneven eyebrows and crooked noses attractive.

GamesRadar.com Top 7...

Bad guys you didn't want to kill

The gaming murders that left a bad taste in our mouths

The Colossi

Shadow of the Colossus

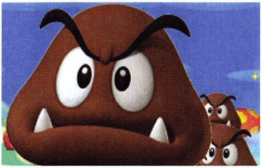
Most of these huge beasts are just minding their own business and only attack once provoked. Colossus 13 doesn't even retaliate, instead merely attempting to shake you off. They clearly feel pain too - stab them in the head and you'll know about it. Come on, one of them's even got a cool beard, yet you still killed it, didn't you? It's dead now. You did it. Shame on you.

Wanna read more?

- Stereotypical gamers we hate
- Gaming nudity you didn't notice
- Secret shame games

Head to:

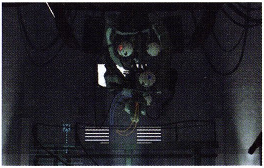
gamesradar.com/top7



Goombas

Super Mario Bros.

If you stand still and they hit you, you die, but then that's true of buses and you don't go around stamping on them. You only get 100 points per kill too - the gaming equivalent of a $5.00 whole chicken. Has life really become so discounted?



GLaDOS

Portal

Just as hostages can come to bond with their captors, so you end up liking GLaDOS - the female-voiced computer in Portal, the Best Game Ever Made (TM). Guilt for killing her is prolonged because you have to do it a piece at a time. While she talks to you. (Sniff.)

Orbinaut

Sonic the Hedgehog

After these critters toss their spikes they're just cute, marshmallowy-looking creatures that just stare and slowly move forwards. They're now totally harmless. Are you really such a bastard that you'd kill them? Yep, us too. But we felt dirty afterwards.

Big Daddies

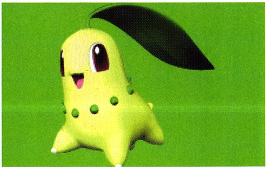
BioShock

They're huge, ugly, armed with a massive drill and turn violent with only the smallest provocation, but the Big Daddies still make us sad when they die. They're only protecting their Little Sister after all. 'Wake up, Mr Bubbles?' Sorry, ain't gonna happen.

Spotty Bulorb

Pikmin

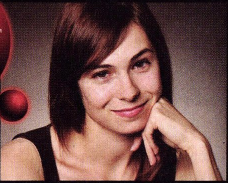
This is the angry mob lynching of gaming, The Spotty Bulorb is surrounded in its sleep, worn down and then killed. While its children watch! Or maybe you killed them first? OK, so it's just like nature. But nature can be so cruel.



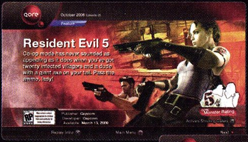
Level 1

Pokemon

You've been playing for ages and you run into a low-level Pokemon. That's when you realise your super-powered team of fighters has become a remorseless unit. What chance does a level 2 Pidgey have against your level 67 Glaceon?



Qore host Veronica Belmont



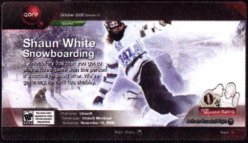
qore
October 2008 Episode 05
Feature

Resident Evil 5

Co-op mode has never sounded as appealing as it does when you've got twenty infected villagers and a dude with a giant axe on your tail. Pass the ammo, lady!

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Available: March 13, 2009

RP
5/5
Monster Rating
Activate Shooting Gallery
Replay Intro
Main Menu
Next



qore
October 2008 Episode 05
Sports

Shaun White Snowboarding

It's not every day that you get to play a video game with the person it's actually named after. We've gotta say, he ain't too shabby.

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Available: November 16, 2008

RP
0/5
Monster Rating
Main Menu
Next

Qore Episode 05– it's FREE to you!

Download to your PS3

THE QORE TEAM'S put together a spook-tacular, monster-themed Halloween Special for Episode 05. Get your fright on with behind-the-scenes peeks at some of the best games coming out right around…NOW!

Fallout 3
Nuclear winter in Washington, D.C. and mutated humans and beasts are really not so happy about the way things turned out. Do you dare leave the bunker and confront their radiation-amplified personality issues?

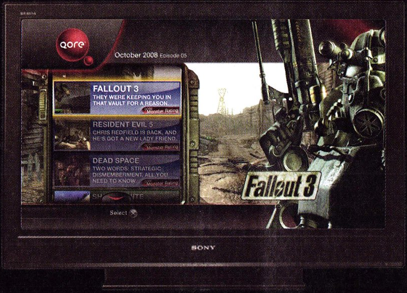
Resident Evil 5
The series that invented the term "Survival Horror" is back and even better on PS3—just don't call them "zombies"—they HATE that!

Dead Space
Talk about creepy. Our "trio of terror" is complete with a game that's banned in China, Germany, and Japan. When you see the gameplay, words really fail to describe…well, actually, how about "Strategic Dismemberment." Also included is an exclusive graphic novel!

Shaun White Snowboarding
Well, it's not exactly spooky, but Olympic Champion Shaun White is a monster on any mountain. Veronica meets "The Flying Tomato" in Park City, Utah for a personal tour of his new game.

New Downloadable Content:
Qore Episode 05 also contains three different shooting galleries. Clear the galleries to reveal a horrifying bonus video segment.

Finally, check out the "What's Hot" section for correspondent Audrey Cleo's roundup of the top Blu-ray releases in October.



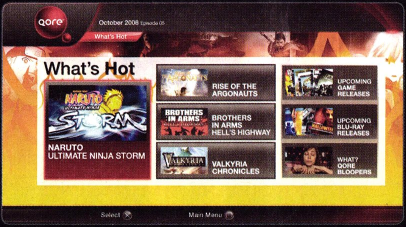
qore
October 2008 Episode 05

FALLOUT 3
THEY WERE KEEPING YOU IN THAT VAULT FOR A REASON.

RESIDENT EVIL 5
CHRIS REDFIELD IS BACK, AND HE'S GOT A NEW LADY FRIEND.

DEAD SPACE
TWO WORDS: STRATEGIC DISMEMBERMENT. ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW.

Monster Rating
Fallout 3
Select
SONY



qore
October 2008 Episode 05
What's Hot

What's Hot

NARUTO ULTIMATE NINJA STORM
RISE OF THE ARGONAUTS
BROTHERS IN ARMS HELL'S HIGHWAY
VALKYRIA CHRONICLES
UPCOMING GAME RELEASES
UPCOMING BLU-RAY RELEASES
WHAT? QORE BLOOPERS

Select
Main Menu

TO REDEEM YOUR CODE: It's now even easier with the Firmware 2.50 update. On the PlayStation Network tab, select Account Management, then select Redeem Codes from the all-new menu.

Enter the code below into the three boxes, then select Continue. Now hit Continue and Accept the download. Sit back and enjoy!

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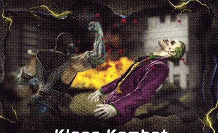
WHICH SIDE WILL YOU CHOOSE?

MORTAL KOMBAT VS DC UNIVERSE

FreeFall Kombat



Klose Kombat

Signature Moves

Koming In November

WORLDSCOLLIDE.COM

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
May contain content inappropriate for children. Visit www.esrb.org for rating information.

POWERED BY gamespy

PLAYSTATION 3

XBOX 360 LIVE

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SACRED2
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17+™
M
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- PLAYSTATION - THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

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- GAME INFORMER

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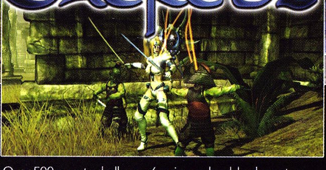
- GAMERSINFO

FALLEN ANGEL SACRED2

A massive 22 square mile fantasy world for up to 4 players via LAN, Internet, PSN® or shared PlayStation® 3 video game system in cooperative, PvP and seamless drop-in, drop-out modes.



Over 500 quests challenge 6 unique playable characters, each with their own devastating and customizable combat arts, deities, and special mounts -- supporting a variety of personal playing styles.

Immersive parallel Light and Shadow campaigns allow players to choose to restore balance to the world of Ancaria, or seize the source of its power for their own nefarious purpose.

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